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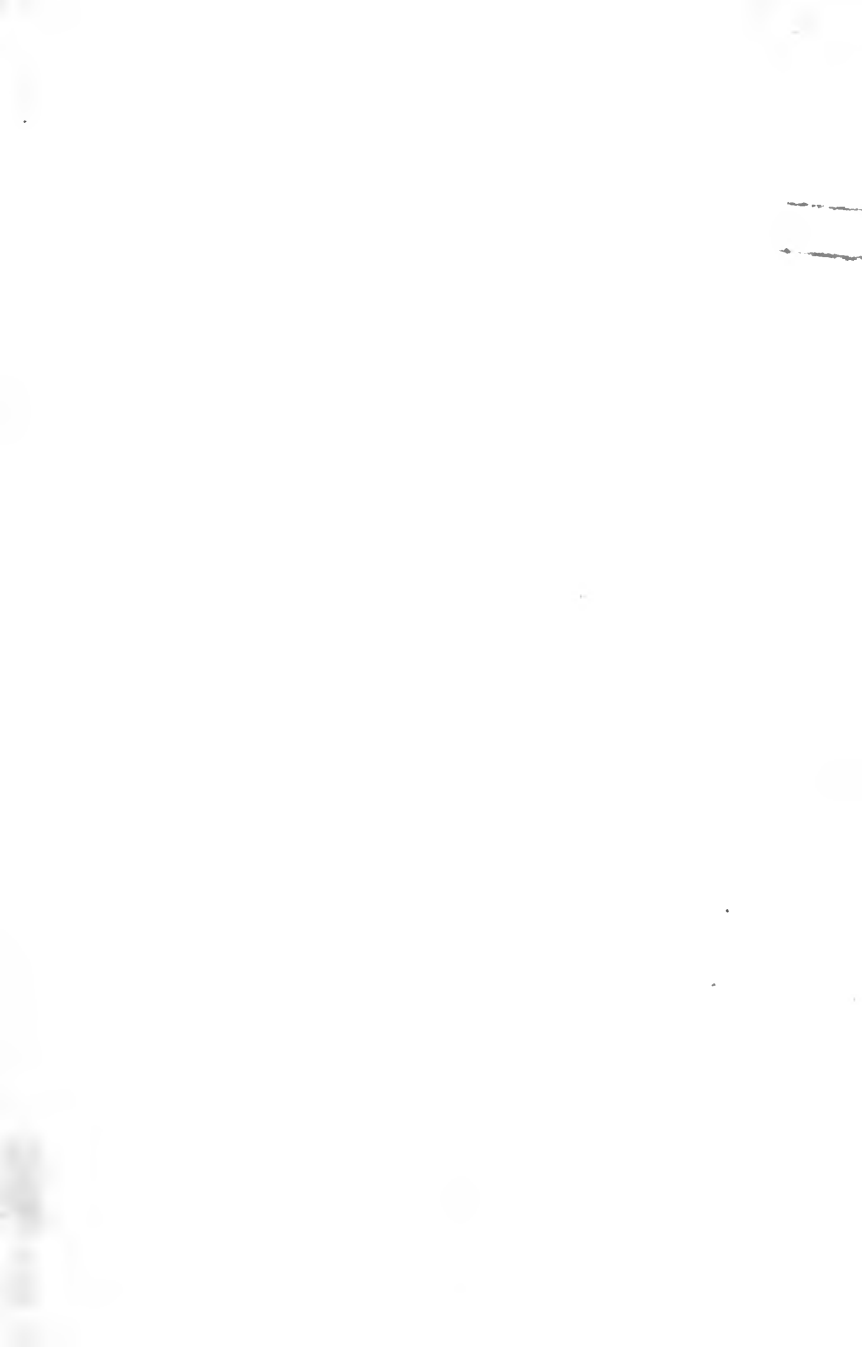
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GRUACH AND BRITAIN'S
DAUGHTER



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

KING LEAR'S WIFE AND OTHER PLAYS
A VISION OF GIORGIONE

And in preparation
SELECTED POEMS, 1894-1914.

GRUACH · AND · BRITAIN'S
DAUGHTER & TWO PLAYS
BY · GORDON · BOTTOMLEY

CONSTABLE & COMPANY
LIMITED & & LONDON

NOTE.—Throughout the stage-directions in the following pages the words “right” and “left” are used with reference to the actor’s right and left, not the spectator’s.

Applications for permission to perform these plays in Great Britain and the Colonies should be addressed to the author, care of Messrs. Constable and Co., Ltd., 10-12 Orange Street, Leicester Square, London, W.C.2; and in the United States of America to Mr. Paul R. Reynolds, 70 Fifth Avenue, New York.

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GRUACH

PLAY IN TWO SCENES

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TO C. H. S. AND C. S. R.

*N*OW, when my life is more than half consumed,
And my yet steady flame gathers its force
More to aspire before the vague, last flare
(That lightens nothing) gutters in the night-wind,
Upon the midway ridge of my short days
I turn; I would not know what is to come,
Down the far slope of the withdrawing wave;
I would remain at this conspiring height,
Whose upward motion seemed my own, and keep,
Keep mine the swift discoveries of life,
The passionate, the unexpected moments
That now, as I look back, are all I have,
All I have longed for, all I have to lose,
All, all I shall regret when I must leave them.

*And first, after the daily use of love
That is not to be told, the common joy
Of life shared with the natural, earth-born forces,
I think of him who from Italian seed
Was born an English man, him who renewed
By moody English ways, at English tension,
For English unilluminated hearts like mine,
The lost Italian vision, the passionate
Vitality of art more rich than life,
More real than the day's reality.
Before I knew his name and his great acts
Of true creation done on God's behalf,
Within himself the assurance of a God,
I lived in the stale darkness of my kind;
And it was his sole deed that I have known
The power of loveliness, the power of truth,
And of imagination that concentrates
Life into more than one life ever gave.
By nameless lovers, lovers with great names,
By fabulous ladies dreamed and almost seen,
By Dante's lost love Beatrice and his own*

*More wonderful and more desireable
Lost love Elizabeth, created once
For him, and once by him in recollection;
And by his rarer light; I learned to live.*

*The first amazement as of a spirit seen,
When in the arts that man has perfected
Beauty is known, is not maintained. The past
Must be resumed in each of us, to each
Deliver its attainment and its hope;
But every man to his own generation
Nearer approaches than to father or child,
And apprehends more intimately by it
The reality of vision and life; and it
More certainly divines the truth of him:
And so, when I had turned the last bright page
Of that dead painter of a keener life,
And felt that the dark mirror of his vision
Was broken, and knew I should not see again
Any new shape of that mysterious beauty
(Which by a heart-ache still brings back my youth),
I kindled with more life because I came
On the same miracle of enhanced life
Continued and renewed in acts of yours.*

*Upon the Dial of the vanished Vale
Were counted chosen fortunate hours alone;
And there began the invention and the mood
That by the shapes of colour and air and light
Has made a life men might begin to-day,
Yet fit for a lovelier earth that is to be,
Out of the England that is here and now—
A region better than dreams, a dawn-lit state,
Wherein the daily Greece Theocritus
Through his half-open door in the same way
Shews us is mingled with succeeding life,
Siena, Avalon, and the Western place
Where Deirdre learned to move and look at men,*

*And with the garden of living ladies where
A silvery bearer of a cyclamen
Looked at her painter and shall be remembered
With the Gioconda; and in this state I found
Assurance that romance is wisdom and truth.
And in those vanished hours of the rich Vale
One in whose birth England and Italy
A second time had kissed was also known;
One who received my first enchanter's force
Of vision to create a keener life;
In whom the knowledge of materials
Leads to design as form leads into colour.
Wherever human days and acts have burned
By breeding and great race to salient height
Of suffering or rapture or quivering
Domination they are subject to his mind:
He has made manifest the shape of Silence:
By beings that never were, centaur and sphinx,
He has made clear the composition of life,
The nature of vitality: and by him
I have understood that I desire from art
And from creation not repeated things
Of every day, not the mean content
Or discontent of average helpless souls,
Not passionate abstraction of loveliness,
But unmatched moments and exceptional deeds
And all that cannot happen every day
And rare experience of earth's chosen men
In which I cannot, by my intermitting
And narrow powers, share unless they are held
Sublimated and embodied in beauty.*

*Dear Masters, in the acknowledgement of debt
There may be grace; but not enough for payment.
I write your names before this meditation
On an old theme, a birthright of our race,
Because I have put therein all that is mine;
And so I give it to you, as I would give*

*All that is mine to you, recognisance
Of what I owe and have no means to pay.
You love the arts so well that you preserve,
Within your treasure-house that seems to rise
In clarity and in tranquillity
Above the impermanence of time, true works
That still are less than those you do yourselves:
Content me by receiving this among them
For your own sake and that of certain dead—
And, most, for the two friends of Paragon
Who sought perfection and achieved far more;
And by my poem's admittance recognise
The duty that I offer, I too your friend.*

August 16th, 1919.

PERSONS:

CONAN, Thane of Fortingall.

AN ENVOY of the King of Scotland.

DOMHNAL, a steward.

TWO SERVING-MEN.

A BOY.

MORAG, The Lady of Fortingall, Conan's mother.

FERN, her daughter.

GRUACH, her niece.

MARGET.

TWO YOUNG SERVING-WOMEN.

A KITCHEN-GIRL.

The scene is laid in Scotland in the early Middle-Ages.

GRUACH

SCENE I.

The scene is the hall of a small black stone castle in the North of Scotland. In the back wall are round-arched folding doors to the right, above which a large bell hangs; to the left is a narrow, tall, round-topped doorway of a staircase that curves upward out of sight. High above these doors an arcade of short thin pillars and small, round-topped arches runs from left to right. In the right wall, toward the back, is a low doorway of a descending stair; along this wall, from front to back, stands a heavy table with accompanying benches. In the left wall is a stone fireplace with pillared cowl; a log fire burns on the hearth, and two lighted torches are set in rings that project from the wall above; there is a curtained recess between the fireplace and the back wall.

MORAG, the Lady of Fortingall, a gaunt old woman, sits in a great chair at the far side of the hearth, warming her hands and listening to DOMHNAL, her steward, an old man who stands near. CONAN, her son, the Thane of Fortingall, sits at the near side of the hearth in another chair, averted from her, whetting a hunting spear with a small stone. In front of the fire, but at some little distance from it, FERN, her daughter, sits on a stool, stitching

G R U A C H

at a heavy white robe covered with a meandering, close pattern in gold: the robe is long and ample and spreads over an empty stool that stands still further from the fire.

DOMHNAL.

THE meat is killed: the veal is blooded: the trout are caught.

Lambs are too young to kill, so four were needed. The mead-vats are well filled.

And now the women make ready to bake all night. . . .

MORAG.

Then stop such waste of fire: send to the village
And tell the bonders' wives that every house
Must send a basketful of loaves at dawn
For their lord's wedding-feast. What else is to do?

DOMHNAL.

Before we sleep the stables should be garnished
For the guests' horses: some ride early, and some
Ride earlier: to-morrow will be too late,
And we must work with torches. . . .

MORAG.

Waste, waste, and never any forethought is here.
Let one sit up till midnight: then the moon
Will join him and work with him, and save the torch.

DOMHNAL.

The bridal chamber is arrayed and ready;
New rushes mixed with lavender are strewn there;
But Marget bids me say she waits to know
How many chambers for the morrow's guests

G R U A C H

She must prepare, and when you will give out
The linen for the beds.

MORAG.

When there is April weather and a moon
Our neighbours will not think of sleeping here.
They will ride home.

FERN.

Mother, we shall be scorned in all the glens
If high-born women are sent out from our gate
To ride in festal clothes put on to grace us
Across Sithchallion on a frosty night,
Or the Black Mountain.

MORAG, *to* DOMHNAL.

Our guests will all ride home.
Bar the great door for the night when you go
down.

DOMHNAL, *hesitantly*.

The Lady Gruach . . .

MORAG.

Is she still out? Then leave it.

DOMHNAL *makes an obeisance and goes
out by the low doorway in the right
wall.*

What kind of half man have I borne and suckled
Who lets his bride upon his wedding-eve
Go out alone and loiter in secret glades
And lonely uplands? Son, will you let your wife
Run wild before the wind of her will like this?

CONAN.

My cousin Gruach, when she first grew tall,
Forbade that I should follow her, or watch

G R U A C H

Toward what refuges of forest and sky
Unbearable moods might take her; and she said
She needed that escape from kinsfolk's minds.
So why should I haunt her last free maiden night
More than a hundred nights of other Springs?
When a most beautiful woman can be wearied
And burdened by a girl's dearest delight
Of stitching her wedding-kirtle and with spun gold
Adding glory to glory for her own shoulders,
Will sight of a patient bridegroom bring her ease?

FERN.

She wrought all day, till, when the evening sun
Was in the elder-tree and a thrush sang there,
She asked me if I could sit still for ever,
And said that she must go.
You are not wise, Mother, to marry her now:
Her thoughts are not with us, she is not ours.
Last night, soon after midnight, I awoke
To a sense of light, to a light held in the air:
She stood above me like a chill, pale pillar.
I sat up, but she did not notice me:
Her eyes were fixed on something above my brow.
"Will you not let me alone?" she said so softly
It drew my tears: "I am not yours" she said.
"I shall be taken from you if you persist;
I cannot think myself into your lives
For ever; I cannot breathe your little air.
Where is the door? There must be a way out:
Will you not shew it to me?"
That pitiful, unnatural gentleness
Changed her to something so unlike herself
I shivered and could not stop: and when she left me
I dared not follow or move, for I had heard
That if sleep-walkers are wakened they may die.

G R U A C H

I found her lying uncovered on her bed
In the early morning; she knew not why, she said,
For she had never left it in the night.
Disquiet that thus lights up dark places of being
And parts the uneasy body from the mind
Is surely a dreadful force best left unstirred :
Is it not then a cause
That you should more examine what you are
doing?
She never wandered in the night before.

MORAG, *who has been counting intently on her
fingers and gazing before her.*

Can two young women of blood be afraid of
marriage?

Her brooding and your shyness are too much fixed
On the occurrences of a single day.

Whatever joy or sorrow the morrow stirs,
The day after to-morrow there will return
This old still life of duty, and Gruach next
Will weep that nothing is changed. Her mother's
lands

March with your father's: they must be joined
again.

Her father was of dead King Kenneth's breed,
And though her line is dispossessed, she is yet
Royal in some men's minds, heiress of peril
But also of great chance; and this my son
Shall take and make his own.

CONAN.

Yes, mother. My cousin Gruach is my friend:
She knows I shall not be too stern or strict,
And that I understand her uneasy ways
And how to let her alone when she's unhappy.

G R U A C H

Since all her hunted kindred were put down
And we have sheltered her, her fief and ours
Have been so fortunately governed as one
That this must be continued. And, sister Fern,
If her fair virginal life is in some danger
From men of the new king's house, is it not wise
She should be covered by our quieter name,
Disguised in our reputed loyalty?
You are too eager in your sympathy
To see my mother's wisdom. . . .

The great door opens from without.

MORAG.

Hush, Conan; she is here. Be short with her.

GRUACH enters and closes the door behind her. She is tall and large-framed, with firm, soft contours and features and a calm expression: she moves and speaks with unconscious deliberateness: her thick sleek yellow hair falls on each side of her face and is bunched at intervals with knots of green ribbon: she carries a great tangle of Spring wild flowers in the lap of her green gown caught up with one hand. MORAG continues.

Girl, you are out too late: look better to it.

Your kirtle is wet: your shoes are clean: you have been barefoot.

A barefoot bride is our shame.

GRUACH.

Will you still chide me? It is my last night.

Yes, yes, chide me once more, tell me my faults,

GRUACH

And satisfy your instinct; for to-morrow
I shall become a wedded woman like you,
And wedded women take each other's part.

FERN.

Supper-time is long past: we did not wait.
Tell Ferdan he may set your supper now.
Where have you been so long?

GRUACH.

I cannot eat to-night: let that pass too.
I went to lose myself; I found the Spring.
See, how a little sweetness has beguiled me:
These foolish things looked up at me. . . .
She spills her lap-full of flowers over
FERN'S embroidery.

FERN.

O, cousin, you hurt—your carelessness will not
count
How much still love I have put into your gown.
Green sap and petal dust will stain it for ever.
The tissue was pure; look here, and here, and be
sorry.

GRUACH, *bitterly*.

Ah, nothing can mar the gown of a happy bride.
I can only wear it once; it is fresh enough for that;
And yellow and yellow on gold will never show.
I hate all yellow things,
And most the yellowness of Springtide life—
Yellow and yellow, cowslip, crocus and primrose;
Daffodil and jasmine, yellow and yellow.
These commoners of Spring put me in mind

G R U A C H

That now the darker flower which matches me
In loneliness, a purple hellebore,
Should also have returned to Glen of Shadows.
I came through Kestrel Wood and over the ridge,
Longing for it as I have longed for a friend;
But, though I have fostered it year after year,
At last it has not come to me with Spring.

FERN.

Will you never, never forget the dreadful flower
Which in our childhood made me sick with fear?
You loved it for that fear.
It is the very colour of poison and sin,
Of bruises and dead men's lips. Why will you
seek it?

GRUACH.

For its sullen, angry beauty and evil intent.
I love to feel it would kill me if it could,
And that I need not let it unless I wish.
When a fierce bird is beautiful it is then
More beautiful by its fierceness; and that rare
flower
Is thus more beautiful by its wickedness.

MORAG.

Come, bride in the bud, you are in my care to-
night;
You must hasten to your chamber and change
your skirts,
That are wet half way to the knee, or the wife's
new wisdom
Will not preserve you from too much fever to-
morrow.

G R U A C H

FERN, *breaking the thread with which she has been stitching.*

Stay, cousin. Your gown is finished; take it with you.

GRUACH.

Sweet cousin, I have been wayward and unkind
To leave you alone to labour on this monotony;
Let it remain a moment until I have changed,
I will finish my side as well.

FERN.

It is finished.

GRUACH, *kneeling by FERN impulsively.*

You darling workfellow and playfellow,
And motherkin and rosy bedfellow
Of long ago, pardon my little hard heart.
You take our frets and burdens on yourself,
And never tell us until we are too late
For everything except to be forgiven.
I wish you could so lighten all my task:
Your love brings strength, and it will be your
love

That presses and nestles about me when I wear it.
When I have stript myself to-morrow night
It shall be cherished unblemished for your bridal.

FERN.

To-morrow I follow a bride for the third time;
And "Thrice a bridesmaid and never a bride"
say gossips.

GRUACH *starts abruptly to her feet, and, stuffing the golden gown into a tight bundle under her arm, goes to the staircase.*

G R U A C H

Wild thing, what have I said to grieve you now?
You are crushing it; you are cruel to crush it;
cruel.

It will only look like dirty linen now.

GRUACH, *turning at the foot of the stair.*
It is too heavy: it is as heavy as fetters:
Its weight will sleek it when I put it on.
And none will want to wear it after me.

*She disappears at the turn of the stair:
presently she passes from left to right
within the arcade above.*

FERN.

I had better leave my door ajar to-night.

MORAG.

She will lie still to-night: she has tired herself.
It is over: she is spent: she will submit.
She can do nothing more before to-morrow;
And when to-morrow is here she must go forward
From station to station of hallowing and lost
hopes,
Checked by the guests' cold eyes if she would
double.
And no one will come here who would listen to
her.

FERN.

She could only tell of me that I would love her
And be her very sister. But no one will come.
*The bell over the door sounds once, a deep
sonorous note. The women look at
each other. Again it sounds once.*

MORAG.

Who rides so late?

G R U A C H

FERN. Surely wedding guests.

CONAN.

Nay, there is but one horse: I heard its feet
While Gruach was saying something just now.

DOMHNAL *enters by the door on the right
and opens the great door.*

THE KING'S ENVOY, *outside.*

I ride in the King's name: in the King's name
I require men's service. Whose is this strong
house?

DOMHNAL.

This is the house of the Thane of Fortingall.

ENVOY.

I ride in the King's name on an errand of weight:
I ask the Thane of Fortingall for a man
To find me the speediest road to Inverness.

DOMHNAL.

You are far from any road to Inverness.

ENVOY.

Then bring me to your lord.

DOMHNAL *opens the door wider. There
enters a handsome hawk-faced young
man with a fighter's mouth and jaw.
He wears a leathern riding-dress: in
the front of his cap a purple flower is
fastened.*

DOMHNAL, *approaching* CONAN.

Sir, a man of the King's asks speech with you.

*He goes out to the right as CONAN comes
forward to meet the ENVOY.*

G R U A C H

CONAN.

You are belated, Sir:

Your horse has foundered, or you have missed
your way?

ENVOY.

I am an Envoy, Thane, of my great kinsman
Duncan, the King of Scotland, of all Scotland,
To Thorfinn, the Jarl of Caithness, a threatening
man.

I ought to be in Inverness with dawn,
But twilight overtook me in strange country.

CONAN.

You have ridden a county wide of your straight
way;

But every Northerly track will take you there,
And the full moon will serve you many hours
If you push on at once.

ENVOY.

The wind has veered, good Thane, to the North
again;

The mounting snow-packs clot in the steely sky;
Your moon is buried; young Spring will die of
exposure.

This is no night to ride in, no light to ride in,
When the rider is lost already.

I must desire your courtesy and duty
To lodge my horse and me till morning comes.

CONAN.

I could have wished it so Yet on this eve
Our attention lies elsewhere There are other
guests

The occasion is not common

G R U A C H

MORAG, *who has been watching the ENVOY anxiously.*

My son forgets:

When the King asks, it is our right to give.
You come, young sir, on the edge of a bustling
hour

Of some festivity, that already checks
Our poor ability and exercise
Of hospitality: at dawn more guests
Need undivided honour, but until then
What we can give is yours.
Is great news in the bud that you ride so hard?
Such urgency might mean some vile revolt
Threatens King Duncan's blessed, heart-easing
peace?

ENVOY.

I go to tell Caithness that the King's wife
Has borne a son, and to require of him
An oath of loyalty to the child Malcolm.
His disaffection has not prospered lately,
He is bruised and in recoil, and it is thought
That if he is confirmed in what he holds
He will consent to grant to a helpless child
A word he is too sore to speak for a king.

MORAG.

Do you believe he will?

ENVOY.

Not I.

MORAG.

Nor I.

Yet this child's weight may hold the King's
throne firm.

I trust our lady, the Queen, is well recovered.

G R U A C H

ENVOY.

It is all men's grief that she is not recovered.
She lies most piteously indifferent
To life and child: she wastes, she is almost white:
She cannot mount the throne-steps. Her leech
says
She cannot safely bear another child.

CONAN, *softly to FERN, as she gathers together her embroidery implements.*

Tell Gruach there's a King's man in the house:
Bid her keep to her chamber until he is gone.

MORAG.

I never saw her: she is not one of us.
Her foreign breed is plainly too light and poor
To make a Scottish mother: a Scottish King
Should wed in his own mountains, where the
women
Are prideful and hard and quickened. I have
heard
She has some beauty and birth; but can a stranger
Bear a right king for us?

ENVOY.

She is a most sweet lady,
So excellent in steadfastness and grace
That she is fit to be a Scottish woman
And Queen of Scottish men.

CONAN, *softly to FERN.*

Go: go.

ENVOY, *continuing.*

She is tall,
And moves as if she walked in her own mountains:

G R U A C H

She is gleaming pale, a daughter of snow-lipt seas,
A golden lady

He falters and pauses, his eyes fixed on the staircase arch, where GRUACH has appeared. She is wearing the white and gold gown; her hair is knotted up about her ears and covered with a narrow, white-flowered veil of gold tissue held in place by a flashing circlet and falling among the folds of her train. As she stands on the first step, her eyes fixed on the ENVOY, the gold of her gown flickers in the wavering torchlight, so that she seems to hover in a light of her own by contrast with the moving shadows of the gloomy hall and the sombre apparel of the others.

FERN, who has started to her feet at CONAN's second bidding, meets her at the foot of the stair.

FERN.

Cousin, what have you done—

You have worn it too soon, you are fey;

You will bring ill-fortune on us. . . .

ENVOY.

Lady, I see that I must be unwelcome,

And that you are ready for friends, not strangers,
now.

I am urged to this intrusion by my service,

Which is the King's, and the strict terms of it.

Your house-folk have received me; do not rebuke
them—

I have laid the King's will heavily on them—

G R U A C H

But add your kindness to their tolerance
Of my unpardoned coming.

GRUACH.

My lord, in that you are come, you are well come.
I am not mistress here until to-morrow;
Yet, if I may, I will add my share of grace
To greet you earnestly, as I should for a king.

ENVOY.

Lady, I thank you. I. . . .

GRUACH.

I am unfortunate to have missed your entrance:
I have not heard your name.

ENVOY.

I am nephew and next of kin to the Thane of
Glamis,
Old Sinel, the King's cousin: Macbeth is my
name.

GRUACH, *to MORAG.*

I knew there was a quality in this knight:
We are required to lodge it suitably.
The chamber-woman is idle and sluggish again;
There is not one guest-room swept or curtained
yet,
Although my meinie of maidens should come soon
To change their gowns there. Would it not be
well
To put him into the bridal-chamber to-night?
None other is ready, none is fragrant enough:
I have looked at it but now, it is strange and fair.
Marget shall deck it anew ere the feast is over;
And I'll array for church in my old cell.

G R U A C H

MORAG, *dryly, and bowing curtly to the* ENVOY.
A bride must have her way.

CONAN, *to the* ENVOY.
What have you done with your horse? Where is
it now?

ENVOY.
At the ring in your outer gate.

CONAN.
I will send a man to stable it.

ENVOY.
Your pardon: I must go down to my patient
friend ;
Or his nut-brown eyes will not meet mine to-
morrow,
Our journey will be longer.

CONAN.
I'll go with you: you do not know the stable.
Mother, shall I unlock the oat-bin for him?
*He takes the torch from one of the rings
in the left wall.*
I will go before you.

He opens the door.
Will you come with me now?

ENVOY.
I thank you, Thane, and follow.

They go out.

CONAN, *outside.*
A sudden frost and a hard.

G R U A C H

The sweat in your horse's coat will be like chain-mail.

What kind of man are you,
To leave a good horse out in a night like this,
And call yourself his friend?

The great door closes behind them.

GRUACH *has remained standing motionlessly, facing the place whence the ENVOY spoke to her, her eyes down-cast, her face tranquil as if she is inwardly absorbed in an entrancing thought.*

MORAG *approaches her.*

MORAG.

The wife of Fortingall will take her place,
Will she? But when she does she shall feel sharply
The wife of Fortingall must keep her place,
And leave her lord to welcome handsome strangers
And dangerous unknown farers in the dark.
A woman wears her wedding-gown but once,
And there's a fate in airing it too soon;
The mocking mischief of your changeling's heart
May well have wrought that when you strip to-
night

You strip the pride of being the Lady of Fortingall.
Yet you must doff it now, on the instant: go:
Get you to bed and hide:

The stranger must not see those eyes again.
He does not hunt you, or suspect your birth;
But if he remembers you by seeing too long
Your noticeable clothing and keen gaze
He may ask questions about you. Go, I say.

Turning to FERN.

Daughter, tell Ferdan to bring food and mead—

G R U A C H

Not the old mead—for the young knight's evening meal.

But, no; I must go myself or the kitchen-wenches
Will send up wedding-meats to save themselves
The grievance of late work.

She goes out by the low door to the right.

FERN.

Dear cousin, will you not retire
Before she can return?

GRUACH, *quietly and unmoving.*
Did you speak to me?

FERN.

My mother wishes us to go:
We are up too late even now.
Think of what the dawn will bring.

GRUACH, *still quietly.*
He is the most beautiful man I have seen in all
my life.

FERN.

How can you say such a thing?
How wicked you must be: I am afraid of you.
Think what you owe to Conan: if Conan heard
He might forget the knight is his first guest.

GRUACH, *raising her eyes, but still quietly.*
Conan could not get near him: he would kill
Conan.

FERN.

He is a noble man, and very fair.

G R U A C H

I wish he would not go away so soon :
Something rejoices in me while I watch him.

GRUACH.

Well, then, grave gentle Fern, he shall not go.
I'll bid him to my marriage, and maybe
He shall hand you to church.

FERN, *stooping*.

Look, look; this little flower was in his cap
When he came in; he doffed it to you alone,
It must have fallen then : you never saw it.

GRUACH, *suddenly alert*.

His flower? It is my colour : give it to me.

FERN, *kissing the flower she has picked up*.

No.

I do what is asked of me each hour of life,
And you all take all I give, and never notice
That I am ever the one who must stand aside ;
And in their turn your children will assume
I am the one who foregoes, who does not count :
I shall have nought of my own when I am old.
But I'll not give you this.

GRUACH, *seizing FERN'S wrist and twisting it*.

But I will have it.

FERN.

O, you hurt, you hurt:

Let me alone.

GRUACH.

Not till you throw it away.

G R U A C H

FERN.

O! O! Oh! Oh . . . h! Soul of a wolf, take it.
She drops the flower: GRUACH releases her and stoops to it. FERN returns to her stool by the fire and seats herself with her back to GRUACH, chafing her injured wrist and pressing it to her, her shoulders twitching as if with insupportable pain.

GRUACH, *kissing the flower.*

Thou thing of tender substance and silent life,
The spirit of thy softness enters me
When surfaces of lips and fingers meet
Thy filmy stillnesses; I fear to press
My longing to thee lest I interrupt
The life I'd fix for ever with my touch.

She fastens the flower in the lacing of her bodice below her throat.

Lie there; move with my life-breath; ah, look up
And breathe again to me his earlier warmth,
As if the vital tremor of his person
Mixed with my heat that veins thy texture now.
Thou hast been set above his brow; sink down,
Bring down to me his head in here, in here.

She presses her hands to her bosom.

The great door opens. CONAN enters with the torch and, crossing the hall, replaces it in its ring.

CONAN.

The stable-knives have waited for no moon:
The stalls are trimmed, the bracken is changed
already.

G R U A C H

FERN, *recovering herself with difficulty.*
Where is our guest?

CONAN. He may come whenever he chooses.
 *The ENVOY enters by the great door and
 closes it behind him.*

GRUACH.
My lord Macbeth, I trust my cousin has found
A lodging for your horse that is to your mind—
One worthy of a life that has your love
And bears a precious burden, a king's message.
Why do you gaze on me so steadfastly,
As if I am not here?

ENVOY. It is your flower:
A spae-wife under a riven, star-lit fir
Gave one to me as I rode out from Scone:
She said it opened from a root of death,
And that it should bring to me some kind of
 fortune.
I flew it in my cap for death to see
And take a challenge from; and then forgot it
Somewhere upon my way. . . .

GRUACH.
I found it in the rushes on the floor.
Its colour spoke to my heart, I put it on:
But let me be your spae-wife and bring you fortune.
 She loosens the flower.

ENVOY.
My flower has found its fortune: let it remain.

GRUACH.
I have no fortune; I come of a root of death,

G R U A C H

Like would kill like; you must take your fortune
from me.

CONAN *has been watching uneasily for an
opportunity to intervene.* GRUACH
holds out the flower to the ENVOY:
as their hands meet and linger on it
MORAG *enters from the right, followed*
by a serving-man bearing a plate of
food, utensils, a cup and a flagon.

MORAG, *pointing to the table.*

Put it down there: hasten your fellows to bed.

He obeys and goes out to the right. MORAG
turns to the ENVOY.

It is late, young lord; my house and I are ashamed
You have stood so long in our gates without rest
or food:

If you will partake such food as the hour affords,
It is set here for you to honour us.

You must pardon us that we do not sit with you:

A long and toilsome day of happiness

Begins for us ere daylight; and my slow hands

Must minister to the bride before she sleeps.

A bride who overslept would be a jest,

When more new things than a girl has had in a
lifetime

Are there, to be had for the putting on; so now

We must withdraw too soon for courtesy.

Dear niece, go you before, and I will bring

My neck-chains, brooches and pins, the linen,
the shoes,

And a cloak to outshine your gown.

GRUACH.

I give you good night, my lord.

G R U A C H

I am to be made a bride to-morrow, my lord:
A bride claims happiness from every quarter,
And I shall be the happier
If you will tarry among my bridal guests,
And follow me to church, and return here.
My husband will go hunting after the service. . . .

CONAN.
Nay, cousin, the day after.

GRUACH.
I ask your pardon, my lord, the day after;
That is a day the better
If you abide with us and ride with him.
He has whetted his spears and paunchers all this
day,
And offer them for the courtesy of your usage. . . .

CONAN.
Cousin, not the old spear with the bronze blade.

GRUACH.
If you can well endure our wilding pleasures.

ENVOY.
I could not slight the hospitality
Of such a day: I thank you for your leave
To ride with you to church.
I shall delay so far. . . .

A slight pause.

GRUACH.
You are good, my lord. Good-night.

G R U A C H

ENVOY.

God find you a fair awakening.

GRUACH *passes out of sight up the stair.*

DOMHNAL *enters from the right, fastens the great door, crosses at the back to the foot of the stair, and stands at the far side of it. He is followed by two serving-men, a boy, an old woman (MARGET), and two sturdy young women; they move quickly and ascend the stair in turn. When the last has disappeared a lanky girl enters in the wake of the others, moving awkwardly in slatternly outgrown clothes, rubbing her eyes, and snivelling. DOMHNAL motions to her to hasten: she stumbles up the stair. The whole train is seen to pass behind the high arcade from left to right. DOMHNAL turns to follow.*

MORAG.

Steward, two hours before the first false light
The men must set the long hall-tables up,
The women must have the seething-pots in steam.

DOMHNAL, *making a reverence.*

Our lady's will shall be done.

He passes out of sight up the stair.

MORAG, *to the ENVOY.*

A bride has privileges, lord Macbeth,
To be much considered, and even more indulged:
We should accept her wishes at this time,
And I am grieved there is no chamber arrayed

G R U A C H

For any guest yet, and that there is no place
Unspoken for at the bride's board to-morrow.
We must, with true unwillingness, leave you here
Until the time for your going; the house is yours
In our intention; let not our imperfection—
That is of the hour, not of our hearts—obscure
Our watchful duty done to our King.

ENVOY.

I thank the Lady of Fortingall for much.
A chair by her hearth and my cloak about me will
 serve
Until I can take the road. If I have your leave
I will open both hall-door and stable-door,
Let down the drawbridge and ride out and away
Into the North by the moon, nor call your house-
 folk
Still earlier than your needs.

MORAG, *at the stair-foot.*

If your high duty sends you to horse so soon
We shall not see you again:
I trust your journey will prosper and be speedy.
 She passes out of sight up the stair.

FERN.

The hall grows colder after the turn of midnight;
There are logs in the corner, and, if the frost
 should deepen,
You will find furs behind the curtain there.
May you rest well.

ENVOY.

I thank your gentle thought.
FERN *passes out of sight up the stair.*

G R U A C H

CONAN.

Have you saddled a horse before in the King's
yard?

Do you know the way of the bit?

ENVOY.

A noble woman is handed to you to-morrow:
No one need wish you joy, you receive its cause.
Such breeding as hers should never be shut up
In these harsh walls and mountains and hard cold
minds;

If you will ride with your matchless wife to Scone
When I return, the King shall hear of you
And take you into his house;
There you shall savour unguessed wonders in life
And come to advancement too.

CONAN.

Will you return this way?
I cannot leave the justicing of my fiefs
That has lately come upon me:
The wolves beyond Sithchallion would increase
If they were left one season.

ENVOY.

Would you hunt wolves when you can hunt men,
fierce men?

CONAN.

I thought that courtiers only hunted women.

ENVOY.

I am your guest, Thane, and would be your friend.
Have you no home to give a shrinking woman
Beside this threatening prison?

G R U A C H

CONAN.

I have a hunting-lodge on the Black Mountain.

ENVOY.

Carry her thither from church, alone and free:
A woman does not wed to gain a mother,
Nor does a man to acquire another sister.

CONAN.

Are you a wedded man?

ENVOY.

No.

CONAN.

Then come to me
For good advice upon your wedding-eve,
And I will talk of what I know. Good-night.

He passes up the stair out of sight: when he reaches the arcade he puts out his head between two pillars, and watches the ENVOY a moment with a face of mistrust and dislike; then he withdraws and disappears.

The ENVOY goes to CONAN'S chair after watching him mount the stair, turns it away from the fire so that it commands doorway and staircase, and seats himself.

ENVOY.

Shall I return this way? I shall return,
As a ghost walks who has left a thing undone.
I shall eat this green oaf's salt and be his guest,
His comrade, his sworn friend, his counsellor,
And sack his bed for him.
The mother bee, that shall out-top her fellows,

G R U A C H

Is straitened in a blind and deepy cell
As in this tower of darkness is this woman.
A spirit of power that shakes my mind is here
In this resourceful woman: she is as still
As the white heat of a straight, half wrought sword
That does not palpitate yet along its edge
Lives quiveringly; she can indeed conceive
Its sudden and brief concentration of anger
In icy tempering, by her sharp life here;
But stillness is her operative condition.
Nothing falters in her; nothing shrinks.
She came to me with her eyes as if she made
Decision, and her nearness of approach
Was more immediate than tenderness:
She came as close to me with her intention
As an unexpected and convincing thought.
If I could add her even force to mine
We could increase life's grasp.

He takes the flower from his jerkin.

Dark, unregarded bud of opening fate,
What is there now to do?
Bring to me no more fortune: all is here.
Deliver me from continuing chance: stand still
In thy unfolding.
Now is my fortune manifested; dissolve,
Turn thou to fire and spirit and permeation,
And fix it here for ever.

He kisses the flower, then drops it deliberately into the fire.

Dark tableau curtains fall, but remain closed only long enough for a brief orchestral nocturne to be played.

G R U A C H

SCENE II.

The same. The torches have burnt out: the glow of the fire is still great enough to illumine the lower part of the hall, but the upper part and the arcade are lost in darkness. The ENVOY is asleep in the chair by the fire, his head on his hand.

ENVOY, *awakening and sitting up.*

Yes. Who is that? . . .

Disquiet that is not sound wakes me again.

I watch becalmed on a dark tide of sleep

That has no murmurs; yet when its small motion

Withdraws me from myself I hear each time

A voice that has no substance.

Too many men have died in this old fastness;

Or else the spirits of its living cannot

Suspend their eager operation and sleep,

As bodies that waste must sleep.

I would pray to sleep if I could dream of her,

And to sleep long.

I lose myself in her with every thought;

Yet when I lose myself in drifts of sleep

She never comes as I could come to her;

I only hear behind a shaking curtain

An unknown presence wrapt with rumourings

Of urgency, quick flame and wilful wreck.

It seems she does not turn to me in sleep;

So I'll not sleep again.

G R U A C H

A small light passes slowly from right to left along the high arcade.

The ENVOY shifts in his chair and handles his dagger.

A light? A light? Though light is honesty,
Yet light at midnight oftenest shines on knaves,
And deeds of darkness sometimes seek a glimmer
To bud and open in.

Is this the oaf that comes to spy or stab?

GRUACH descends the stair, walking in her sleep and bearing a small and lighted night-lamp; she is in her night-clothes, and tumbled, tangled masses of hair that escape from her night-cap fall about her like a golden shawl.

ENVOY, *half rising and huskily.*

Lady, how did you know?

She is unconscious of him, and, as she emerges from the arch, turns from him toward the place where he stood at their first meeting: she moves slowly and uncertainly, and in bearing and demeanour reproduces FERN'S description of her appearance on the previous night.

GRUACH, *speaking always in a veiled hesitating tone.*

Beautiful stranger, why are you here?

I did but change my gown,

And in a moment you come

From empty valleys.

O me, if I had missed you, my lord.

G R U A C H

You are so kingly made,
Fair and desireable,
I am drowned in flushes of gladness.
I would cover you with my being like a veil
To hide you from women;
I would pour out my being over you
Like faint moonlight that is yet universal
And enfolds kings and their kingdoms.
Will you take me? Will you not?

ENVOY, *simulating her tone, but with repressed eagerness.*

Ay.

GRUACH, *as before.*
The light is going fast.
I cannot see you plainly now.
O, where, where are you?

ENVOY. Here.

GRUACH.
Say it again. Tell me once more, blest spirit.
Repeat thyself: be thine own mirror
And shew me twice thy heart.
When wilt thou take me?

ENVOY. Now.

GRUACH.
You have gone farther off. Will you leave me?
Whence do you speak to me?

ENVOY. Out of the darkness.
I shall not leave you until you bid me go.
Am I a stranger now?

G R U A C H

I to myself am strange ; I do not know
My voice, my stumbling senses, or my will.
But there is nothing strange in you, white lady ;
As in a welcome dream nothing is strange
When newly come delight seems in a moment
To have been ours for life.
I have believed that you were on the earth,
As some believe in gods they cannot see.
In this first hour love is not born in me :
I recognize ; I remember ; I possess :
I am here to take my own.

GRUACH.

Yes ; yes. O, do not cease.
You utter many words ; I am tired,
I catch in vain at them as they gleam past ;
But in your voice is truth,
And truth, that oftenest means unkindness,
This once is joy.

ENVOY.

Men have too many words : but there 's a word
That holds all others, as you hold for me
The provocation of all disquieting women :
This love is to strike deep, and when you awake
You shall be sure of me, you shall devote
Fire of your brain, fire of your heart, to me.

GRUACH.

Where ? Where ? Your voice sounds close below
me.
You must not kneel to me.
Come, come to me : I would bend down
And clasp you into my breath,
But creeping palsies hold me ;

G R U A C H

My arms and thighs are heavy things
That will not move for me.
You know she binds me:
You can loose me: you dare not act.

ENVOY, *in a clear, natural voice as he starts to his feet and approaches* GRUACH.

Falter no more in the dim passages
That in the outer walls of life's house burrow
And endlessly return upon themselves.
Awake and with me dare. Awake! Awake!

GRUACH, *awaking, loosens her hold of her lamp, which goes out in falling: she stares, startled; then, with a plaintive, long sigh, reels and sinks: the ENVOY reaches her barely in time to receive her in his arms.*

Have I broken the bird's wings to catch the bird?
Have I shattered the door of her mind to enter there?

This ruin is done in me; I have unbuilt
The only hallowed place where I can worship.
A slight pause.

Her heart begins anew;
And nascent life is trembling everywhere.
He kisses her.

Not any words shall peril her again
By sudden occurrence; I'll use a quieter means,
And through a more unwary sense infuse
My life into her sources, into her thought.
He kisses her repeatedly.

GRUACH.

Where am I? What have I done?
Some distillation lately touched my lips:

G R U A C H

A freshness that awoke me lingers there.
What will you do with me, beautiful stranger?
Why are you here? Who are you? Go from my
chamber.

Loose me. Leave me. Loose me. Let me go.

*She first seizes his shoulders to push him
from her, then slips her arms about
his waist and wrestles with him. Her
onset almost overthrows him, and he
only continues with difficulty to hold
his own.*

ENVOY.

Listen. . . . I am the same Macbeth. . . .
It was the distillation of my soul. . . .

GRUACH, *unheedingly*.

Thieves are men of the night: murderers
Are men of the night. You have the stoat's and
foumart's

Passion for throats in the dark: you are not one
Who kills in the open, you would kill in sleep and
In the vile safety of a private room.

Faugh, you foul treacherous beast. . . . Aha, aha,
My hand is on your dagger: let go your hold,
Or I'll drive it down the side of your neck.

ENVOY.

Strike.

*Her bare arm shoots up to bring the dagger
down with force: he catches her wrist
in the air.*

Lately I heard your spirit take a voice
And from outside our earth-taught reticence
Speak: sure and clear and deathless and afar,

G R U A C H

Like the first half-waked bird in Spring's first
dawn,
Its darkling dewy murmurs then gave up
Your mind to me, your being to me.
Would you undo it in a waking dream?

GRUACH.

You! You! O, dangerous knife.
What thoughts have you pressed into its haft of
old?

Not many breaths ago its touch lit in me
Conceptions of destroying unknown to me :
My mind was ready, and I did intend
To strike you down and desolate my years.

The dagger falls from her hand.

Speak softly, my lord ; but speak.
How have you found my chamber?

ENVOY.

Look about you.

GRUACH.

Why have you brought me here?

ENVOY.

You came alone.

GRUACH.

Were you here before me?

ENVOY.

Surely.

GRUACH.

But why? But why?

ENVOY.

I have slept here.

G R U ' A C H

GRUACH. Had you, then, thought to meet me?

ENVOY.

We might have met no more.

GRUACH.

Did you not care?

ENVOY.

I cared to do your wish more than my duty:
I was cheated of choice. Your elder kinswoman
Denied to me your offered bridal bed
(I would have lain beside it on the floor),
Deprived me of the kneeling room you gave
Near to your feet at the altar, and of the seat
Upon your bench at the board; and left me
nothing
But leave to ride away before you rose.

GRUACH.

I am sick in my limbs and my mind to learn so
late
I might have lost you while I dreamed of you—
For I have dreamed of you to-night, my lord,
In the security of a sweet to-morrow:
I am sick in my reins and my compassionate body
To feel each time you speak that I have meant
To tear your flesh with a sharpened piece of iron.
You know what it means to me, do you not?
And yet I do not know why I am here.

ENVOY.

You sought in sleep the stations of our meeting,
As holy women the stations of the Cross
To act again life's chosen, passionate hour.

G R U A C H

GRUACH.

I am not a sapless girl to walk in sleep:
I can control my force.

ENVOY.

You came to me:
You told me all I know.

GRUACH.

I did not speak:
I dreamed I heard your voice, but not my own.
A slight pause.
If women spoke in sleep they would awake,
They have suspicious ears.

A slight pause.
What have I said?

ENVOY.

The things you felt last night, heart-shaking
things
That timid men teach women to wait to hear;
The truth of your live spirit loosed unaware,
That, rising suddenly from ancient darkness,
Took on its wings the light of the next dawn
Before the lonely night below was past.
The rapture of presence; the offering of love;
The radiance of surrender: of these you spoke.

GRUACH.

All, all is true. What more have I said? What
else?

ENVOY.

You uttered no more but love.

GRUACH.

It was well said. I could not say it now,

G R U A C H

Conscious that you would hear. I am glad it is
done.

And you? I dreamed your voice, but not your
words.

ENVOY.

The rapture of presence; the offering of love;
A sense of strange remembrance: I told of these.

GRUACH.

I knew it all last night: what will you do?

Time and men's rules will part us quickly now,
And nothing will be left.

My father's race is ruined, my mother's kin
Hems me in here in grim solicitude;

My cousin and his mother demand my hand;

They mean my land. I cannot stand alone:

Even the trees and mountains in this wildness

Huddle together against the blasts of time

And planetary tempests: what should I do?

This is my hour of fate, this is the time

When I must break the blind restricted seed

That I am now, move with the winds of life

And yield my mental issue to them again,

Or in this present burial rot and change.

Is your love strength or weakness? What will
you do?

Help me, and now.

ENVOY.

I shall not ride away as I was bidden;

I shall remain.

When Fortingall has all his guests about him

I will declare our love and, by the weight

Of Duncan's kinship insisting on obedience,

G R U A C H

Forbid your marriage until I come again,
My errand to Caithness done, and claim your troth,
Marry you here and carry you to Scone.

GRUACH.

You will not get away from them alive:
There are no King's men here.
And if the King sends men to look for you
They will not know which rock in this rough
valley

Was chosen for your grave-stone.
You must ride now as you were bidden. And yet
You must not ride from me: take me to Scone:
I should be here no more if you returned.

ENVOY.

That will not much commend us to the King.

GRUACH.

Then I'll to Caithness too; but now, now, now.
You must ride now; and I must go with you.

ENVOY.

But shall we not be followed?

GRUACH.

To the death.

ENVOY.

Why must I risk your life?

GRUACH.

The chance is good.
Conan can only think one thought at once:
His hunt will storm to Inverness, while we
Ride North by East until we are far from here.

ENVOY.

And wed in Caithness' church?

G R U A C H

GRUACH. And swiftlier wed
In the first church we come to when we are clear.

ENVOY.
Ride with me: let us go.

GRUACH.
 "Sir, are you sure of me? Before you take me
 You should be told I was born your enemy:
 I am of a more ancient house of kings
 Than you: King Kenneth was among my fathers.

ENVOY.
Then with your love
You bring a power over many minds
That, if we are added truly to each other,
Can set us higher than either house has stood.

GRUACH.
You can be great if you are so great-hearted.
You are my redeemer, you shall have my faith;
Service, and I can serve you with men's truth;
Devotion, and I could wreck myself, my world,
To reach its end, your good.
One thing is mordant in me at thought of you;
When we fought body to body you overcame.
I must undo it; let us strive again.
Come, let me grasp you.

She holds out her arms to him.

He takes her hands and draws her toward him; with a low cry she feigns to faint, and he catches her to him; she lays her head on his shoulder, and laughs lightly and gently.

G R U A C H

ENVOY.

Circling each other so in soft enclosure,
Loosening our folds with mutual-moving breath,
Our wreathing seems to rustle and expand,
As crushed, unwrinkling petals in a bud
Widen together in unbroken touch,
Begin a blossom's effluence, concede
A blossom's trembling welcome to the night
That fills it, and that it believes it fills.

GRUACH.

Beloved, we are foolish: we should ride.

ENVOY, *loosening her*.

Put on your clothes: I go to saddle horses.

GRUACH.

I have no clothes: all that I ever had
Are in my chamber under the tower roof:
I dare not fetch them, I might rouse many sleepers.
Everything I have worn since my hair grew long
Was spun and woven and stitched in Fortingall:
My kin shall feel my clouts flung back at them
If I go out with nothing. I can endure it:
I have gone barefoot in snow before to-night,
And there is now no snow.

ENVOY.

You cannot live against the rushing sharpness
If we push North to-night.

Going to the curtained recess.

There are furs here;

You shall be wrapt in them.

*He brings furs piled on his arm, and
throws them down before her.*

G R U A C H

GRUACH. No, not the white one
The white bear-skin is Fern's from Norroway;
She was born cold and bloodless; she is soon
 chilled,
She needs it. Bring the wolf-cloak. Put it round
 me.

ENVOY.
Your thin white feet are far too cold already
To start on such a journey. Are there no shoes?

GRUACH.
Ay, in the tower: but shoes in the air are useless.
We shall find old brogues in the stable.

ENVOY.
What horse shall I saddle for you?

GRUACH.
Saddle no horse for me: I must ride with you:
Two tracks would tell our tale more certainly.

ENVOY, *unbarring the door*.
Will you mount black Fingal here?

GRUACH.
His hoofs would sound on the stones.
Halter him to the ring at the outer gate:
I will shortly join you there.

ENVOY, *having opened the door*.
Snow: there is snow.
O, tranquil, dreadful calm: O, deadly peace.
We are shut back into the cast-off life
By pale, relentless, softly closing gates

GRUACH

That no man ever opened.

We may not ride to-night: your fate has fallen.
Or is it mine that hurts you?

*He throws open both doors: the ground is
seen to sink sharply away from the
threshold to a narrow white valley
among white mountains. A faintness
in the sky permeates a dense mist of
lightly falling snow.*

GRUACH.

O, joyful silence; soundlessly dropping curtains
About the secret chamber of the earth
That shall contain our bridal bed. O, sleep,
The bride's white hush is in me; I will part
The soundless curtains, and meet what is within—
Either continuing sleep, that can withdraw me
From this dead life with love my latest hope,
Or delicate, wildering waking in some pale room
To find my love with me.

Will you not come, my lord?

The snow is but a salting yet: I go,
For in an hour the breeding, feeding storm
Will cover our foot-prints, stifle all pursuit.
We can point straight for Inverness untracked,
And thread the perilous pass ere drifts are deep.

ENVOY.

Know you the roads?

GRUACH.

I know them.

ENVOY.

I am ready.

GRUACH.

If the storm clears, our dark shapes will be seen

G R U A C H

Afar in the sharp air.

*She steps to the pile of furs, throwing off
her cloak as she goes.*

Wear Conan's sheepskin coat. Help me to don
Fern's bear-skin cloak; lift up the hood . . . Stay,
stay;

I must put my hair up first.

*She tears off her nightcap and throws it
into the sinking fire.*

I have no pins.

Where is your little dagger?

ENVOY, *stooping where the dagger lies.*

It fell in the rushes.

GRUACH, *holding her upcoiled hair with one hand.*
Give it to me.

She thrusts it through the coil of hair.

Cover my head with the hood.

Is your horse dark like you?

ENVOY.

He is black as smoke.

GRUACH.

You can abandon him.

Conan's white battle-horse will serve us better:

Few men can see him moving against new snow.

ENVOY.

He saved me in a clenched, stark river-fight,

When armoured men went down a falling spate

And heavier horses under them: again

He saved me from a murderer in the night

By crying out in his stall across a garth:

When I shall enter the stable presently

G R U A C H

He will speak to me before I am in his sight,
He will stamp until I speak to him, and touch.
I cannot leave him here.

GRUACH.

You set me in more danger.
Although you should devote your life to him
You cannot keep him more than a dozen years.
Do you put a horse before me? Speak. Be sure.

ENVOY.

The King could send a rout of men-at-arms
To claim him later—soon—in his own name.
Turning to the door.
Which is the horse?

GRUACH.

White Uthal is near the door.

ENVOY.

Shall I return for you?

GRUACH.

I would first write
This life's last things: I cannot forego it now.
Give me some leaf to write on, I have nothing;
Her scrivening-skins are locked away.

ENVOY.

I have nothing.

GRUACH.

What is there in your wallet?

ENVOY.

Nothing is there,
Save my King's letter to the Caithness Jarl.

GRUACH

GRUACH.

The margin of that will serve.

ENVOY.

We must not touch it, lady. The King's hand
Is hallowed, the King's seal is inviolable:
With it I lose my life.

GRUACH.

Your life is not your own: it is now mine.
Shew me the letter.

ENVOY.

Beloved, it must not be.

GRUACH, *laying one hand on his shoulder, and
taking the letter from his wallet with the other.*

It must; it is my pride that it shall be.

She breaks the seal and opens the letter.

ENVOY.

Your dear hands are soon cruel.

GRUACH.

Look, it is well;

This piece is bare save for a superscription.

ENVOY.

And half of the King's name within the fold. . . .

It is too thick to tear.

GRUACH.

Not for the teeth.

*She bites the edge, then tears off one
portion of the letter.*

Keep this. It is enough. I have not hurt you.

There is still more left than the Jarl will care
to read.

G R U A C H

ENVOY.

I must blame some serving-man for this.
It is not wise for a well-born man to say
He has been so familiar with a menial
That such a letter could come into base hands.

GRUACH.

Dearest and dearer, pardon me for the sake
Of the true words I shall write on it to my kin.

ENVOY.

You have no pen.

GRUACH, *searching among the ashes on the hearth.*

A wood-coal twig writes well.

Beloved, you loiter long: hasten, and ever more
hasten:

The bridal dawn is near, my enemies awake.

ENVOY, *as he goes out by the great door.*

I serve you for ever, white spouse.

GRUACH.

I shall be ready ere you.

He disappears downward to the right.

GRUACH *lays the fragment of the
letter on the table to the right and
stoops over it to write.*

Is it so soon? What, shall I suddenly
Believe this life is done and I can go?
I am not foolish yet: in my deep places
I know it is not so. I know the way
In which hope gutters out in a cold draught,
And life is seen to be a habit, heavy
To put down courage, vision and eagerness.
The marvel of this night being perfect now,

G R U A C H

Some meagre unexpected chance can soon
Flaw and disperse it in a long, sick moment,
Perfection being momentary of nature;
And when, the kind, deceitful darkness over,
Impoverishing daylight shews to me
The dead life here, I shall be here alone.
O, let me dream anew, and in a dream
Of uttered scorn sting vivid life to spring
Back to my sinking heart.

She writes.

To The Lady of Fortingall.

I am not of your blood to obey you; I will not
mother your blood. I would live, so I leave you.
For your lodging and nurture take the Bride of
Fortingall's clothes in payment; you will find a
doll to fit them who will sit where you put her.
I have given away my lands; keep your hands
and feet from them.

She writes.

To The Heir of Fortingall.

If you would be married, choose your wife for
yourself. I have gone away with a man, and you
will not see me again.

She writes.

To Fern.

I leave you my love with my wisdom. When
you meet a proper man, take him before another
woman can. You will not come to life until you
cross your own threshold and sit by your own
hearth.

Gruach.

It is an aged woman's hand.

I cannot write to-night.

The hand may waver, the flanks shake, the limbs
Tremble, as mine do now, and yet the heart

G R U A C H

May hold its firm and steadfast course untouched,
Being nearer to the mind;
But here the immediate substance of my heart
Slackens and shivers, my mental force withdrawn;
I have no strength to continue this delay.

He is too long.

Why should a fair, strange man regard my lot,
Or reverence my will? He need not do it.

He will not come again; and this is all.

I'll go to him.

Is that a sound? A door upstairs; a footfall?

She runs to the stair-foot and listens.

Nothing. A gown trailing? Nothing. Nothing.

ENVOY, *as he approaches the doorway from the right.*

The outer gate is locked.

GRUACH.

The key is here.

*She disappears through the low doorway
to the right and returns instantly
with a large, long key.*

We can lock the door outside and ride away with it.

She laughs softly.

ENVOY.

As we go down and pass the stable-door,
Do not ask me to speak. Fingal would hear.

GRUACH.

Let me go first; step then upon my footprints
And wipe them off my kindred's soil for ever.

ENVOY.

Before our life begins,
Before we go, tell in this hallowed place
The name I have not heard; whose sound I await

GRUACH

As waking, eager birds await the light :
Your name, my light, your name.

GRUACH.

Within the dark immuring womb a blind
And unseen child is nameless, and I too,
Unliving and immured, will have no name
In my subjection; this white waif of night
Shall have no name for you.
The altar-priest shall speak it first to you.
Before we leave this iron-coloured prison,
Vow you to me that, when you have the weight
In the King's mind to do a lawless thing,
You will return and tumble down these walls
Into a cairn of stones, and burn the stones
To ashen dust wherein no weed will strike.

ENVOY.

This is a holy house for me; the hands
I lay on it would turn to hands of blessing.
The husk that has shed you is still a shrine
Which in my old age I shall seek again.
We cannot burn the past; it would stand yet
In you, in me. Then let it stand for me.

GRUACH.

Lift up your hand and vow, for love of me.

ENVOY.

I will do all that any man can do,
For love of you.

GRUACH, *going to the hearth, and gathering a
handful of wood-ash.*

It shall go down, or like a broken tree
Whiten and crumble to a hollow bone;

G R U A C H

The moon shall soften it to a cowering dread,
And shapeless noises shall inhabit it.

*She moves slowly from the hearth to the
great door, scattering the ash with a
sower's motion as she goes.*

I sow and I sow the chaff of the seed of fire:
The waving, barren harvest of wilding flame
Shall here spring up, nourished by stormy air.
Come ruin, ruin and grief upon this old
Dwelling of sorrow and my captivity.
My mother died of grief; it is not ill
Her hard, unfaithful race should die of grief.
Come, ruin, down upon their greedy life,
Destruction and unseating of the mind;
Woe, be embodied to their unclosing eyes
While brackish tears run down and lodge in their
lips,
And all they have flies up in flakes of flame,
To fall as now these ashes.

*With the last words she reaches the
threshold, where she turns to the*
ENVOY.

Come, Macbeth.

*She goes out by the great door and, descend-
ing to the right, quickly disappears.*
The ENVOY follows her.

*After a short pause an owl cries twice with
a long retreating sound, as if dis-
turbed and flying away.*

*A light passes from right to left of the high
arcade: DOMHNAL descends the stair,
a lamp in his hand.*

DOMHNAL.

The stranger is not here. He has gone, maybe.

GRUACH

That would be well ; we want no King's men here
Among the annoyances of a day of rejoicing.

How cold the house has grown.

Both doors left open? He has certainly gone.

He must be highly born to be so careless.

Snow, snow, snow.

It is the last injustice of the order of things

For snow to be added to the burdens of a feast-
day.

Men will tread it in, and out, and in again ;

Fine ladies will tread it upstairs and downstairs,

And spread it with their skirts until the bride's
chamber

Is like the track to the cowsheds in a wet Autumn.

I can but shut it out awhile.

*He turns to go out by the low door, then
he sees GRUACH's letter on the table.*

A letter? This is the stranger's courtesies :

He is not graceless, though an upstart's man.

"Gruach." What have I here?

The young man has truly gone, and with what he
could carry.

The new King's men are all reivers and robbers.

"I will not mother your blood . . . I have given
away my lands . . .

I have gone away with a man . . . You will not
see me again . . ."

Oho, Oho ; here are great things to do.

But which is first?

*He stands in deep consideration, the letter
in his hand.*

*A sound of scuffling and women's voices
wrangling comes from the high ar-
cade. Presently one of the young
women hurries down the stair, pulling*

G R U A C H

the girl after her by the arm and followed by the other young woman, who thrusts the girl forward from behind. The girl stands sobbing and rubbing her eyes; she is only half dressed, and carries the rest of her clothes under one arm.

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN.

Come on, Onion-Peeler, Grease-Skimmer, Rancid
Rags;
You shall learn not to lie in bed like an earl's
daughter.

GIRL.

I will not go: I will not.

SECOND YOUNG WOMAN.

Lig-a-bed, you are to be up first. (*Pinching her.*)
Will you remember?

If you are not down in time to kindle my fires,
You shall be pinched all over, all over, all over,
Until you are like a bush of ripe blackberries.
So. (GIRL. O!) And so. (GIRL. O!) And so.
(GIRL. O!)

GIRL.

I'll not bear it. I'll not stay, you murderers.
My mother told me to go straight home to her
If the kitchen-ladies at the Castle were unkind to
me.

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN.

Go home to her now: she will be glad to see you,
And gladder still to see old Marget after you.

G R U A C H

GIRL.

I cannot help it: I cannot: indeed I cannot.
When I am with you by day I only see what is
there;

But every night when I am alone the Sight comes
on me.

It will not let me sleep until the dawn begins:
Then I am heavy and sick. Let me lie down.
Pity, pity me.

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN.

What do you see, you mole, when the Sight is on
you?

GIRL.

I see the Lady Gruach.

Both women laugh.

SECOND YOUNG WOMAN.

We all see the Lady Gruach
More than we choose; but she never keeps us
awake.

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN.

Nor do we call it second sight when she appears.

GIRL, *desperately*.

I tell you I see the Lady Gruach every night.
She is covered from shoulder to foot with a trail-
ing, spreading cloak
That is not red like blood, nor blue like the deep
lake,
Yet gleams of both in the folds: it is covered with
green, bright eyes.

G R U A C H

There are large green lights in her hair over both her ears.

She wears a golden crown as if she is a queen.
Her pitiless face alarms, yet I must look and look:
Her gaze is hard to me, yet when we meet by day
She holds no memory of me in those cold eyes.
Nightly she bears a dagger. . . .

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN. Shivering liar,
That finds you out: you have neither sight nor
truth:
Queens carry sceptres, they are not seen with
daggers.

SECOND YOUNG WOMAN.
And how can Gruach ever become a queen?
She is to wed long Conan after sunrise.

GIRL.
She bears a dagger, a red dagger. . . .

FIRST YOUNG WOMAN, *seizing a tangle of the*
GIRL'S *dangling hair.*

Come on.
 Your second sight is not worth waiting for:
 You had better see your own ghost lighting fires,
 For that is all you are worth. Come on.

SECOND YOUNG WOMAN, *seizing the GIRL'S hanging hair on the other side.*

Come down, you shall draw me the water.

G R U A C H

GIRL.

O, no, no!

*They hurry the GIRL by her hair out
through the low doorway to the right:
she sobs and protests inarticulately
and struggles as they go.*

*The BOY descends the stair quickly, and
follows the women out.*

MARGET follows the BOY down the stair.

MARGET.

The women are too noisy.

DOMHNAL.

Let them alone:

The girl from the clachan has been marred at
home,

She needs rough teasing.

MARGET.

They are not too rough,

They are too noisy: they must be spoken to.

DOMHNAL.

Let them alone: there is a graver thing
To speak of now.

The man who yester-eve knocked at our gate
Has carried off young Gruach in the night.

Go down and stop the roasting and the boiling:

I go to raise the house and the whole township,

To send out riders to hunt the naughty child,

And others to meet the wedding-guests who ride

And turn them home again.

MARGET.

How have you heard of it?

DOMHNAL.

By Gruach's hand:

I found this writing on the table here.

*MARGET takes the letter, turns it about
all ways, and throws it on the table.*

G R U A C H

MARGET.

Leave it for others to find. All shall go on.

Again, old friend, you are about to be

A foolish, vain, officious, blind old man.

What have you to do with it? What have I?

Morag is ageing: when the old devil dies

We do not want a ferret-eyed young mistress

To keep us still uneasy. Let her go:

Fern is mild: Conan will follow her.

And let the feast go on: Conan would feast

If Gruach were dead, and welcome the event

That brought him many guests: he will not miss

A bride he feared, if he may eat. Come down;

I'll lift the crust of the lamb pie for you.

She goes out by the low door.

DOMHNAL.

Elderly women believe they are always right:

But this one may be now.

He follows MARGET out.

*The two SERVING-MEN descend the stair;
one supports the other.*

FIRST MAN.

You are drunk.

SECOND MAN. I am not drunk.

FIRST MAN.

I say you are drunk.

SECOND MAN.

I am not drunk: I was comfortable last night,

But now I have slept it off. You can see for
yourself.

G R U A C H

FIRST MAN.

You have not had the time to sleep it off:
We are fetched out of bed at an immoral hour.

SECOND MAN.

A most unhealthy hour; an immodest hour.
But all will be well to-morrow in the morning.
The new young mistress, the pink and coy young
mistress,
Will not forsake her bed to-morrow morn
At the unwise hours ordained by the old mistress.

FIRST MAN.

That is deep wisdom. You are drunk, nevertheless.

SECOND MAN.

I say I am not drunk.

They go out together affectionately by the low door.

CONAN *descends the stair stealthily, peeping round the corner mistrustfully as he comes. He is in his shirt and cross-gartered braccæ, and barefooted; he holds a sword out of sight at his side.*

CONAN.

The disquieting stranger has gone. He has truly gone.

I could have slept again had I believed it.
He has not finished here: he will return:
He shall not pass my outer gate again.
But he is gone: I should be easy now,
If this were not my wedding-day.

G R U A C H

The Thane of Ardven's daughters will look at me,
To watch with mocking eyes what I shall do;
And Gruach will not look at me, nor seem
To know I stand or kneel or sit by her.
But that's no grief; when she does look at me
She brims me with discomfort. She is not fit
To be a wife: she follows her own will.
I had liefer wed the bridge-end blacksmith's
daughter:
She fills her clothes as well as my lady cousin,
And her lips bring thoughts of dew on rosy plums.
I am not afraid to touch her. If I touch Gruach
I feel her body go hard beneath my hand,
And danger crouching there: if she does nothing,
She makes me feel outside her.
I would not wed her if she had no land:
The inconvenient wisdom of my mother
Is not to be avoided; land is land.
The knightly stranger shall not imperil it.
He has gone. It is early. I'll get to bed again,
And sleep till I am called.

He turns to ascend the stair.

CURTAIN.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

PLAY IN ONE ACT



TO EDMUND GOSSE

BY Babbicombe and Oddicombe
The daily waters go and come,
And rise and foam, and fall and foam:
And on that unforgotten shore,
Whose freedoms can be mine no more,
Backward through time's prospect-glass
I see a dwindling presence pass,
A lonely youth who loitered there
In the still, sparkling Winter air,
Thinking of plays and poetry
And beauty newly found thereby
That should to life at last give life
And make it worth enduring, strife
And scorn and bitterness and numb
Passion alike that made youth dumb
At misconception of hard men
Whose world of getting hemmed him then,
Whose sympathy was at the best
A kind contempt, indulgent jest,
For all that could not be possessed.

And as he paced that shining shore
He thought of you long years before
Treading those shifting stones beside
The changing volume of the tide,
Learning the nature of beauty there
By other ways of youth and care;
And when the waning Winter light
And sharpening air and sense of night
Oncoming turned him once again
To warmth and firelit windows, then
In your old footsteps still he passed
By Petitor and Fore Street last
To a sequestered house near by
Of learning and austerity,
Shyly kind and primly wise,

*Sweet with learning's innocencies,
Goodness, sincerity and grace
Of gentleness filled that calm place
By her who still inhabited
Its chambers, and their master dead
Kept present by the cherishing
Of her benign and ministering
Memory and its tender glow
Upon the things of long ago.*

*With lamplight, and the curtains drawn
Upon the empty tree-wrapped lawn
Pale beneath an early moon
And stilled save for the broken tune
Of wandering sea-air scarcely heard
Among the topmost boughs unstirred
Above the house, she spoke of you
Then lately gone, the men you knew,
The books you knew, the books you wrote:
At that first news of things remote
From meagre life yet daily true
A heaven and earth were made anew;
The kingdom of the word became
Power, illumination, flame;
Romance, enchantment came to be
Fact and authenticity.*

*How many days, how many ways,
Since those far-off and primal days
Lit by their own interior light,
Have I pursued the infinite
Of poetry, how often found
Upon some new-discovered ground
I trod among your footsteps still.
Tidings of unknown poets would thrill
The mind from some chance page of yours;
And, while the craftsman's quest endures,
By instinct and but half aware*

*Deep in my consciousness the care
I shall remember wherewith I
Eagerly and delicately
Savoured the delicate certainty
Of your clear verse's filagree,
Then found that savour could impart
My earliest lessons in the art.*

*Take then from me a gift in kind,
And let it say that, though my mind
Broods upon ruder themes than those
In which your rare fair music flows,
Yet I have lingered once to hear
That music and still hold it dear
And unforgotten in the glow
Of beauty taught me long ago.*

December 31st, 1920.

PERSONS:

MADRON, a British peasant.

AN OLD MAN, a Briton.

A YOUNG MAN, a Briton.

PLACIDIUS, a Roman General.

A CENTURION.

THREE ROMAN SOLDIERS.

A YOUNG ROMAN SOLDIER.

TWO ROMAN SAILORS.

NEST, a Princess of Britain.

WIDAN, her nurse.

ELLIN.

ENNID.

FIVE GIRLS.

THREE WOMEN.

A YOUNG WOMAN.

AN OLD WOMAN.

SOLDIERS, SAILORS, AND POPULACE.

The scene is in Britain at the period of the Roman
subjugation of the country.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

The scene is a sea-shore on the South-East coast of Britain at midnight. The night is clear, with a few stars; the sea is still, except for the occasional splash of a small wave at the water's edge and the occasional flash of a star's reflection extended along a gathering ripple.

In the darkness the sterns of two Roman galleys make a darker mass at the back to the left. In the right foreground rises a weed-hung, salt-encrusted mooring post.

A young woman, NEST, is tied by the wrists to a ring in the post higher than her head: a pale, blood-bedabbled cloak hangs from her shoulders and falls close to her body. At her feet an older woman, WIDAN, crouches on her knees; she is covered with a dark blue mantle that makes her almost invisible in the night; her head is bent and her long, thick, grey hair falls forward over her face. A Roman soldier stands on guard near the post, leaning on his spear.

The silence at the rising of the curtain is broken by a sob and a short low cry from WIDAN.

THE SOLDIER *sings in a rumbling undertone.*

THE rat is a sociable fellow,
But I cannot abide his tail;
I like to hear the long bone crack

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

When my little dog's teeth get into his back. . . .

The song is lost in a yawn. He addresses

WIDAN.

Fat hen with no rump feathers,

When will you weary of squatting in your dust-hole?

What will the other old women in the town

Think when they hear that, while they were in bed

Shivering lonely, or waking with cold bones

Of skinny husbands thrust against their sides,

You have been out all night with a fighting man?

Get home and leave your little princess to me.

WIDAN, *raising her head and addressing* NEST.

Nest, Nest, your silences stung them. Why will you brave them?

Why are you stubborn for these great-hearted ways?

What is the use? Yield, and live.

If you are lashed again you will not live.

Will you not save yourself? Then save others:

The last woes come upon us all at dawn.

Obedience is required from you in the end:

This is more bitter for you than for low beings,

Yet you must learn it. There's a hard place in life

When it is plain to everyone who is born

That something in another mind arises

Which he will need to obey, or life is checked:

Then wilfulness is only violence

Done against the indifferent nature of life.

These outland Romans will not kill us all

If you permit them to do their governing,

Which is so dear to them, over you and us.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

THE SOLDIER.

Tall maiden, I have daughters in several places
I shall not see again, and the thought of them
Inundates me with a fatherly feeling.
The aged are all for caution, never for glory;
But they live longest: and low people know
They need one voice to utter their hearts, and one
To talk to mighty men with: women know
Submission only frees their natural force:
And soldiers do not fight unless they must.
Then yield and live in stillness here, or else
Either to Hades or to Rome you fare.

*A silence follows, in which NEST thrice
raises her head wearily, as if she
would address WIDAN: the third
time she speaks.*

NEST.

What is the hour, nurse?
No, do not speak. I have no need to know,
For all that I must do is to endure.
Is it dark yet, or is the night in me?
Stars glow and pass too quickly in my eyes,
Sunsets or sudden dawns go out too soon.
All night a surf-bell tolls, yet none was there;
Or this continuing darkness is eternity
Where a great clock strikes one each hour for ever.
Is the tide rising? Am I to be drowned?
The high waves beat the earth; they shake my
limbs.
Yet now they do not sound, though I still throb.

WIDAN.

Your limbs shake? Will you fall?

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

NEST.

I can stand for ever, unless my dim mind swoons.
But if I lose myself you must buttress me,
Or I shall tear my arm-strings that I need
While I have life and Romans tread my land.

WIDAN.

I saved your clothes: shall I wet the linen
And lay it on your shoulders and your brow?

THE SOLDIER, *pricking WIDAN with his spear as she is about to rise.*

Granmam, lie down, or I shall make a hole in you
In a wrong place. Has not your tribe been told
By the centurion, by the general, and by me,
That no one is to finger this felon girl,
Or speak to her, or even step on her shadow,
Until she has been assessed and handed to fate?
I am loved and longed for in every garrison
Between here and Rome, being an easy man
Toward all sizes and patterns of petticoats;
And though you are foodless, coinless, roofless
and shigged,
I am kind and have left you both without muzzle
or bit

So long as you talked comfortably to her,
Dripping good advice like a worn-out spigot
With the cask's lees behind it on her hard mind:
But humoured women are quick to go too far,
And now I see you'll loosen her ungratefully
And leave me her shoes to stand in for full pay:
So cower and hush, or go;
For when I must be strict I am always angered.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

WIDAN.

My bosom-piece, my Nestling,
Why would you light the bale-fires up again?
When, with the Queen, the hosts were overthrown
They accepted shame, they stooped i' the yoke;
so now

They are being murdered after more defeat,
They are named dishonoured fighters and word-
breakers.

Call off the Western rally; tell the men
To get to their townships and to hide their arms;
Say that the beacons were raked up by witches,
That marsh-pooks bore the brand from farm to
farm,

And you may be let live.

Obey, obey, and something can be saved.

NEST.

Where is my mother the Queen?

WIDAN.

She is dead.

NEST.

Where is my elder sister, Widan?

WIDAN.

Dead.

NEST.

Where is my younger sister?

WIDAN.

Dead. Dead. Dead.

NEST.

Then I am changed; I have become a queen,
The Icenian queen, mysterious to myself.

B R I T A I N ' S D A U G H T E R

You must not lesson or chide me, or call me child,
Or think because your pap has nourished me
That blood like yours runs in me untransformed;
For in the mixing of a queen and a king,
And doubly by the use of power, there stirs
A spark that turns the substance of the blood
To white ethereal fire most hard to thwart,
Harder to bear, and yet to be sustained.
I have no earthly kin; I stand alone,
I am not commensurate with human things.

THE SOLDIER.

I knew a woman once. . . .

NEST.

Obedience is the duty of each one,
But my obedience is a sterner passion
Than anything that others or you can know.
I have no protection, I am stripped and bared
To my own judgment with none to temper it;
The torment of clear vision is in my lot,
I must obey myself, I dare not flinch.
Am I unjust to make men fight and fail?
Injustice is the essence of discipline,
And when they are weary of failing, weary of woe,
Something will swell in them, their minds will
change,
They will succeed: let them but be, with me,
Determined not to feel, and to obey:
Britain is holy: it is mine and theirs,
And we must keep the trust. The Western men
May reach us before dawn: if I could hear
The Western tidings. . . .

THE SOLDIER.

Once I knew a woman. . . .

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

NEST.

Midnight cannot be past: this is an hour
Of flittering ghosts and haunting. Tell me, nurse,
Are dead men free and potent on this edge,
Nor earth nor deep, where no life can take hold;
Or is't the very shore where they embark
For darkness? Tell me quickly, and get me loosed;
Then I can see my mother before dawn comes,
And hear her need and mine. Or do I hang
Upon the edge of sense, and shall I lose
The borders of being? Almost outside my eyes
I see a grey thin woman flap and sway
With skimming motions like an alighting bird's.
I cannot move my head to follow her.

WIDAN.

No ghost walks nearer here than Maiden's Leap.
Has she white long hair?

NEST.

Grey loose hair.

WIDAN.

Mad Ellin wanders so upon this shore;
Yet she's no ghost, but only a girl gone grey.
By day she sleeps, by night she wanders so,
Looking at nothing, seeking her lost mind,
Her dead self.

NEST.

It comes again: it starts,
Throws up its head like a frightened coney and
checks:
Nurse, it can fly: it has gone!

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

THE SECOND SOLDIER, *outside and at a little distance.*

Tune up, you jades :
You had better not sulk when I speak pleasantly.

THE FIRST GIRL, *also outside.*

Kiss me quickly, my mother is coming, soldier.

A shrill unnatural laugh follows.

Two soldiers enter from the right rear, driving before them, respectively, three and two girls with clothing and hair torn and hands bound behind and held in long leashes of rope. THE FIRST GIRL, in the group of three, carries herself gaily and provocatively; the others are crying quietly.

THE FIRST SOLDIER.

Hoi, Brennus, what have you there?

THE SECOND SOLDIER.

Forage, forage.

THE FIRST SOLDIER.

Whither away? Are you for ship-board now;
Or do you change the guard?

THE SECOND SOLDIER.

We are the ship-board guard;
We bring up reinforcements, like good soldiers.
Nights are too long; we tired of catching our fleas
And needed a nimbler hunt.

THE FIRST SOLDIER.

Such soft wrappings
Are not for fighting men, who should lie roughly.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

Keep one for me until my watch is past ;
You do not need the nosegay.

THE THIRD SOLDIER.

Covetousness and envy among comrades are sins,
Greediness is a sin, and lust is a naughty sin :
Whisper to your trussed pullet there and leave
our pickings to us.

THE FIRST SOLDIER.

Keep the red-haired one an hour or two for me—
The one with the jolly face, who leers at ill luck :
I have seen no damsel nearer my mind or size
Since last I went rat-catching on Tiber's bank.

THE FIRST GIRL.

Hearken to nuncle rambling in his mind :
He's an old man ; he has a beard ; he looks forty.

THE FIRST SOLDIER.

You are a fine woman : love me and leave me, if
you like ;
But do not undervalue me until you know me.

THE FIRST GIRL.

Aha, nuncle, are you there ?
You are bow-legged ; you are short of breath ;
you creak.
Go in and pull your night-cap over your ears,
Bandage your rheumatisms, and mottle your legs
at the fire ;
And learn your times are over.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

THE SECOND SOLDIER, *twitching her by her wrist-rope.*

Animal, you speak to a Roman fighting man ;
Be humble and obliging. And save your breath ;
You may be short of it later.

NEST.

Who is the woman, Widan ?

WIDAN.

Birgit's daughter Megg.

NEST.

Megg, daughter of Birgit, I have heard.
Britain is bleeding, Britain is dying to-night,
And waiting for worse things than death at dawn :
The young men of our land, my land and yours,
Lie out on frozen mire, dying to-night :
Does one of them stare up at unseen stars
And think death would be well if you were saved ?
Or were you always light and free with yourself,
Yielding yourself to a fancy or a bribe ?
Then there are many men beneath this sky,
Whose blood runs out to enrich the soil they tilled,
Thinking kindly and gently of you, and how
Your body can multiply such bodies as theirs,
Renewing Britain's sap to fight again.
But you are japing with their murderers,
And too much love spills from your roving heart ;
You love your enemies and anyone.
Our sacred uplands, this old reverend tide,
And young men's agonies thought of now and now
Should have a voice in you :
Though trapped and fangless you can find sharp
stones

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

To push between your ribs, and then to-night
Lie down unconquered as your lovers lie.

THE FIRST GIRL.

What have you to do with me, to command me,
To speak to me, child of the evil race?
I know when I am defeated: let me alone.
Shall I tell my enemy my heart with cries?
Shall I waste my blood as you waste others' blood?
If men must fight for Britain, women must live
for Britain:

But your mother and her brood, the ruling women,
The mad fighting fools, who have poured us out
In their pride, in their high-handed magnanimity,
With noble gestures of their souls, with priceless
passions,

Let them be brought to lamentation;
Let them discover they are not higher beings than
women;

Let us be freed from the danger of their great
vision;

Let them die, let them die, ere they ruin Britain
again.

You Roman dog, snoring upon your spear,
Why do you covet my body when half the night
You have stood untroubled near this finer corpse?
We are all dead women, but still alive enough
To suffer. And she is royal: will that stir you?
At her; at her; be at her, and let her find
The need to laugh at her enemy, and the light
To tread our bitter path.

NEST.

Megg, daughter of Birgit, I and you
Never spoke together before now,

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

And shall no more—so soon we must be stilled :
Speak to me if you wish, but spare yourself
My judgment on your quality ; reject
The common, violent, ineffectual things
That no one needs to say.
Rain-drops from different heights fall side by side :
We might have sunk far down in British earth,
And turned to loveliness ; but now we fall
Into a vagrant, barren, shapeless sea :
Yet even an ebbing tide preserves this land,
And when the certain flood sets in again
A greater wave shall fling our spirit up,
Our ardours reach their own, their aim, at last.
What I have done was done to serve our land
And its inheritors, not to serve you :
If your hard, helpless passion and ill will
Are for your country's griefs and not your own,
You have capacity, had you intent,
To know I have done well.

THE SECOND GIRL, *one of the two and
puny and younger than all the others,
bursts into more piteous crying and
stumbles forward to the length of her
rope, speaking between her sobs.*

THE SECOND GIRL.

Rain-drops that fall ? But we are blood-drops that
fall :

Britain is bleeding, Britain is dying to-night
Because you broke the peace the Romans gave.
Or if we live we must bear Roman boys,
Bastards and serfs, to fight against our Britain ;
Such evil mothers as your mother was
We must become, hatching broods to destroy it.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

You have taken our youth from us, you have
 taken our age,
You have turned a nation into heaped refuse
To prove your foresight and your fortitude.
We lift our heads above the settling wrack
And laugh to see the ruin crush you too. . . .
We laugh. . . . We laugh. . . .

*Her words are lost in loud breath-catching
sobs.*

THE THIRD GIRL. Hearken, royal girl;
May your hard death sound thus in others' ears.

THE FOURTH GIRL.
Hush, now she's Queen !

THE THIRD GIRL. Deliver us, Queen !

THE FIFTH GIRL. Shield us !

THE FIRST SOLDIER.
Beaten people are often eloquent,
Brennus; but there's no time for eloquence here.
Be off with your pecking cage-birds, for all this
 music

Will bring the captain of the guard upon us:
I see his lantern. Beside, we have learnt before
That a hen-fight never comes to anything.

THE THIRD SOLDIER.
True, true, O man of wisdom.

THE SECOND SOLDIER. Come up, you beauties:
Good-night, old monument.

B R I T A I N ' S D A U G H T E R

THE FIRST SOLDIER. Sleep well, my friends.

THE SECOND *and* THIRD SOLDIERS *drive*
the girls forward again and out to the
left rear. There is a short silence.

THE SECOND GIRL, *at a distance.*

Mother, mother! O, no! I must not go.
Leave me: I cannot go.

THE SECOND SOLDIER.

Cut her down if she will not come quietly;
Or all the camp will know we left our station.

THE THIRD SOLDIER.

Get up, baby; stand up.

Again a silence.

NEST.

Is she dead?

WIDAN, *raising her head and peering into the*
darkness.

She is lying still.

NEST.

If she is only wounded and not maimed
She could be sent into the Western hills
To fetch me tidings of the Western fight,
That is a fair hope yet. Someone must toil
To the far hills and back before the dawn,
And you are old and useless. Go to her.

WIDAN.

She jerks all over: she is dying.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

NEST.

I liked the terms of her ingratitude,
Her passionate injustice and force of hate:
She loved our land too much to think of me.
She would have served: 'tis pity she is dead.

MADRON, *a Briton, an elderly man, slips stealthily and swiftly from the left front toward NEST, and begins to beat her on back and shoulders with a belt which he carries in his hand.*

MADRON.

If the Romans kill me to-night
I have lived as long as my hope:
The blood of the unjust Queen
Shall pay me again and again
For my discomfort of shame,
For the town's scorn pointed at me,
And the wrong and oppression done
For her country's sake.
If this were the old Queen's body
I would kill it again. . . .

An involuntary low exclamation escapes from NEST at the first blows, and she visibly braces herself to support MADRON'S assault in silence.

Meanwhile WIDAN has sprung at his throat from her crouching posture; he goes down under her, and she begins to strangle him.

Take care, you are choking me. . . .
Princess, Princess, Princess,
Call off your old wild she-dog. . . .
Will you let her kill me?

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

THE FIRST SOLDIER, *who has been nodding on his spear.*

Hey . . . How . . . Who . . . Why . . .
What—When . . . Where from. . .

He advances with his spear ready.

The old women of this nation fight better than
the young:

We ought to have roped them too. If I were a
marrying man

I would rather have the old cat than the kitten.

She needs no help: she's best let alone.

He retires and resumes his guard.

NEST.

Let the man stand up, Widan.

WIDAN, *preoccupied.*

Hush, hush: leave me alone:

He will be quiet soon.

NEST.

Let the man stand up, I say.

Live Britons, although rascals, are worth more
Than Britons dead by honest British hands.

WIDAN.

Yes, deary; be patient; I am too stiff-jointed and
old;

I cannot do things quickly as your thoughts do
them;

But I am here because your will is mine.

I shall only bind him carefully lest he harms you.

*As she speaks she kneels on MADRON'S
neck and binds his hands together
with the belt he still holds. Then she
rises and addresses him.*

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

It is my lady's will you shall stand up:
And she must be obeyed ungrudgingly.
But if you hurt her again I shall hurt you more.

NEST.

Now who are you, weak man who does by night
The things he plans but dare not do by day?
What is your name? And are you of my race?

MADRON, *rising with difficulty*.

I am called Madron the Potter.
I come from the next township.

NEST.

I am a Briton too: are you my foe?
Why would you injure me? Your enemies
Already blemish me and wound my heart
In more unbearable and dreadful ways
Than you were born to dream of or to do:
May not these griefs prove that I am your friend?

MADRON.

What virtue, reward, or profit is there now
In being a Briton? Roman hands are heavy;
So they can truly guide, they can protect.
The Romans have unlearned your childish folly
Of fighting for pleasure, for healthfulness or pride;
They advance their battle to spread the Roman
peace,
The Roman order. We shall live better as
Romans,
And safe from your ungovernable kind.
You are to be forgotten in quiet years;
But bitterness is in me and must out
For your hard mother's chill injustice done

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

When I was beaten on three market days
Where the whole countryside could see and hear.
I have prayed that my intolerable feelings
And impotence to ignore them might renew
Their force in her and her high fatherless girls:
So now my peasant mind and hands rejoice,
Repeating ruin on your helplessness.

NEST.

You mean that the just Queen once punished you
Against some limit of law, reason or truth?
Potters were not often known to her:
Tell me, how did she find that you exist?

MADRON.

I drove a beast in milk from her full pastures
Because her foraging fighters threatened me
And took my only cow.
Yet but an hour before I had believed
I should give more and heartily for her,
Thinking blindly that I was free to give.

NEST.

Then, Madron, you were whipped for being a thief.
Have you made me a thief by whipping me?
If our protectors' needs had left you free
Would Britain now be free?
Just blows have left a sore place in your mind,
Which shews unease of thought not found in me.
You cannot make me feel your festering shame,
And if it comforts and inspirits you
To hurt me more than any Roman can
You shall cut my back again, if, when you have
done,
You will this night act in one thing for me

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

On which Britain's recovery may turn.
Nurse, loose his arms ; give him his thong again,
And let him lay on quickly.

WIDAN.
I cannot find the fastening in this light.
He is so safe: I dare not loose him now.

NEST.
Disloyal, be my hands or go from me.

WIDAN.
You know I must not go.
*As she is fumbling with MADRON'S bonds,
three women swathed in dark blue
cloaks enter from the right rear.*

THE FIRST WOMAN.
Is this the spot?

THE SECOND WOMAN.
Is that the girl?

THE THIRD WOMAN. Surely.

THE SECOND WOMAN.
She looks taller.

THE THIRD WOMAN.
She is stretched.

THE FIRST WOMAN. But not enough.
They laugh.

THE THIRD WOMAN.
We shall hear all here.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

THE SECOND WOMAN.

But shall we see her face?
When do they start on her again?

THE THIRD WOMAN.

At dawn.

THE SECOND WOMAN.

The cold strikes through my shoes: even on the
sands

The rime is thick. The rime will settle on us,
The frost will reach our bone-pith before dawn
comes.

I shall have a stiff stomach for a week.

THE THIRD WOMAN.

You should have brought two cloaks.

THE SECOND WOMAN.

My house is full of drunken Roman men
Who throw their arms around my empty mead-
vat.

THE FIRST WOMAN.

At the top of the street I passed a dead woman
Wearing good clothes. I pared off her skirt and
leg-cloths,
And donned them over my own.

THE THIRD WOMAN.

We can keep warm if we cower close together.

*They seat themselves on the earth between
NEST and the back of the scene, hudd-
ling near each other and hunching
their knees under their chins, a dark
indistinct mass in which only three
pale faces are clearly visible.*

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

NEST.

Where is he? Does he fear my blood at last?
Dullard, begin ; begin.

MADRON, *released by* WIDAN.

I have not seen such mettle in a girl.
My lasses are flinchers and wheedlers and all for
themselves.

Delicate meats, soft clothing and warm fur,
The eagerness of hunting, and gold that frees
From long toil and subservience, seem to breed
A generous and daring freedom of spirit
That more might share if more were favoured so.
Maiden, the keenness of your soul can hurt,
Though not your pride or state, not your steeled
mind :

Life is fair and an opening wonder in you :
I will not touch you ; I will serve life in you,
Though not your state, if you will tell your need.

NEST.

By Arvodun and Meirodun go forth,
Keep on by Ford of Tain and the Wood of Blaen,
By Giants' Pound and Weirstone and the Beacon ;
Look for my Western men and get their news,
Find if their battle is joined and say to them
That we are ruined here and look to them.

MADRON.

Where will you be to-morrow?

NEST.

I do not know.

MADRON.

I'll find a horse and come again with the dawn.
He turns to go, then returns.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

Give me your pardon: I respect your passive
power: I am grieved I touched you.

NEST.

Do what I ask: your deed will pardon you.

MADRON *goes out to the right, passing in
front of THE FIRST SOLDIER, who
has for some time again been nodding
on his spear.*

THE FIRST WOMAN.

Where will she be to-morrow?

THE THIRD WOMAN.

They will leave the body here.

THE FIRST WOMAN.

That man's wise thoughts will never lead to acts.
Men are so full of sentiments; a flush of feeling
Can turn them at a touch to mistrust or shirk
reason,

Keen and cool reason that leads to irresistible
deeds

In women who can hate. But the man was right:
We are like the bees that are so poorly bred
They are neither men nor women, and like them
We fadge us a queen out of such stuff as ourselves
By too much feeding that makes hot and hasty
blood,

By warm cradling, blind respect, and make-be-
lieve

That what we have raised above us is better than
ourselves:

But we lack the bees' sense, who, when they hatch
too many queen-grubs

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

Kill them all off save one. That might have spared this ruin.

THE THIRD WOMAN.

Better one than many: but better none o' this kind than one.

NEST.

Women, who are ye? What do ye seek from me?

THE SECOND WOMAN.

What does she say?

THE THIRD WOMAN.

She is asking what we seek.

THE SECOND WOMAN.

I seek my two sons: would she pay me for them? What do you seek?

THE THIRD WOMAN. I seek my sick husband: I cannot find the house where he lay. Has she seen it?

THE FIRST WOMAN.

Ye are burdened with grief alone: I am spent with fear:

Your men are only dead: I seek my daughter. Prayers run round in my mind all night apart from me

That I may behold her fate if I watch the Queen's daughter.

WIDAN, *again seated at the feet of* NEST.

I know you: I know you now: henceforth you are marked.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

Ah, selfish beings, it is such things as you
Who make men think that women have no souls.
What are your little losses to my lady's,
Who has lost a queen for mother and a kingdom?
Respect her silence. Get on with your laments:
A bleating cow soonest forgets its calf.

THE SECOND WOMAN.
Who is it?

THE FIRST WOMAN.
Widan, the old Queen's go-between.

THE SECOND WOMAN.
She was once a poor man's daughter, but the
great ones
Have hardened her heart with comfort, and with
their leavings
Have weighed down her mind against her des-
pised kind.

THE FIRST WOMAN.
You speak too loudly. There are footsteps. Some-
one comes.

THE THIRD WOMAN, *turning her head toward the
right rear.*
Only Mad Ellin is there.

THE SECOND WOMAN.
Is she out in a night like this? Then ruin impends.
My sons say she's no woman, but a sea-bird
That flies to earth and hides in an earth-born
shape

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

From a following storm of the evil force in darkness.

ELLIN *enters from the right rear: her supple and flitting motion, slim figure, and delicate features are those of youth, but her hair, that falls loose beyond her waist, is grey. A scanty, grey woollen gown that reaches to her ankles, her hair, and the cold pallor of her features and bare feet, make her seem as if a film of hoar frost covers her.*

ELLIN, *to herself and as if she thinks she is alone.*

Ellin must find the little wolves

And dwell with them in the farther hills:

There are live men everywhere to-night

And she cannot hear her thoughts for their thoughts.

They have frightened the dead into vanishment

From their foothold between the earth and the sea,

Who will need no more to walk with Ellin

But will be content with the lately dead

And will dread this sounding place for ever.

WIDAN.

Ellin, Ellin, why are you out to-night?

ELLIN.

Angry Widan, what are you doing?

Why are you always angry with Ellin?

WIDAN.

Why are you out to-night?

What is your sister doing?

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

ELLIN.

Dilys drove Ellin out of doors:
She is left alone with an iron man.
Ellin has come to her little one
That once was a baby crumpled and warm
Before you put it into this sea
When waves sprang high. A wild wind brought it
Back to her breast like a wide-winged gull:
It seeks her here on the moony nights.
She aches to find it safe to-night.
Let Ellin go: why, why are you here?

NEST.

Widan, this inhuman happy voice
Which chills me is that of a woman younger than
I;
And yet she says a wicked thing of you.
What does she mean? What can you know of her?
Come here, poor girl.

ELLIN, *noticing* NEST.

What is a girl doing there?
Why is she reaching up into the sky?
Ah, cruel Widan, you have tied her.
Has she been naughty? What have you done?
When Ellin was naughty you tied her so.

NEST.

Come here, strange girl.

ELLIN.

No. Ellin is afraid of you.
You smell of blood. What is under your cloak?
*A child's crying is heard, intermittent
and approaching.*

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

WIDAN.

Obey, Ellin: a divine presence speaks,
A daughter of our gods speaks here to you.
This was the Princess Nest, and is now the Queen.

THE THIRD WOMAN.

There is the child again: it has followed us.

THE SECOND WOMAN.

You should have gathered it up and carried it
Under your two warm cloaks.

THE THIRD WOMAN.

My slack arms could not hold it: I have not eaten
For a night and a day and a night.

THE FIRST WOMAN.

Everyone in that house was dead but the child:
What can we do with it? Can we save ourselves?
It will die to-morrow: it had better die to-night
Easily in the frost. Do not notice it,
Or it will come to us.

ELLIN.

She cannot be a god or queen
If she can be tied up or whipped:
And if she had ever been a queen
Bonds and defilement of her blood
Would make of her a common woman
Subject to men and feared no more.

At the beginning of this speech a very young child is seen to pass slowly and hesitantly from right to left across the back of the scene, close to the water's edge. As its faint, fitful crying comes nearer it attracts ELLIN'S attention.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

Ellin's little one, Ellin's daughter
Seeks her in the night of fear;
Wingless and helpless she returns,
Escaping from the jealous sea-birds,
Gently floated 'twixt darkness and tide;
Small enough to fit the bosom
Of Ellin, with tiny spread hands that are fainter
Than wing-feathers, breast-feathers, neck-feathers,
down,
Yet quick and quiet and fluttering and grown,
And a creeping, tender voice of her own.
Lullaby-by, a-by;
Lull, lull, lull-lullaby.

*While speaking she has gone to the child
with a dainty, swift, swooping motion,
and taken it into her arms. As she
finishes speaking she disappears with
it quickly by the way she came.-*

NEST.

What is this of a child? Have you done dark
things?

WIDAN.

Ellin's my sister's girl: she was born simple:
She conceived a child unknown, to an unknown
sire,
Dropping it in the wildwood, nursing it there.
She fouled the scent of a wolf for the Queen's
hunt;
The huntsmen found her and the Queen said
If idiots might breed idiots when they would
Her land would be over-run: the child must die.
I pleaded for it, and she bade me drown it.
My kin misjudged me for my dutifulness:
Do not misjudge me now.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

THE FIRST WOMAN.

Ay, what a Queen was that: the earth was hers
To idealize, judge, improve and cut to waste.
Poor folk and poor folks' brats have been to her
Like maggots in cheese, to be smeared off at her
will.

WIDAN.

Women, put by your grudges and griefs and
spites:

Be all Icenian till our country is free.
The watchman sleeps: help me to loose our Queen
And get her to the shelter of a wood,
The safety of a cave, where she can gather
Spent men and hearten them again to conquest
And lead a force thence to the Western men.
Do this, and I shall pledge her word and mine
That when she has driven out the Roman pack
The nation in assize shall probe and judge
Her deeds, her aspirations, and your wrongs,
Before she shall have leave to rule again,
Dispose of lives, or quarrel in our names.

NEST, *shrieking and wailing abruptly.*

Aia! Aia! Aiaha! Nurse! O, nurse!

A bat is in my hair! Deliver me:

Come to me: come quickly: it is cold and creeps:
It is wet and slimes my neck: will you never
come?

*A shivering moan each time she breathes
shews that she is shaking all over:
she swings her hanging locks, throw-
ing her head back repeatedly, drags
at her bonds, and stamps repeatedly
like a startled thoroughbred horse.*

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

WIDAN, *starting up.*
Yes, child, I will.

THE FIRST SOLDIER, *having awakened at NEST'S cries.* Get down: have I not warned you?

NEST, *shivering convulsively all the time she speaks.*
Yes, yes, she will obey: and then, good Roman,
Will you not help me and ease me? I will entreat
you.

Hasten; now, now: come, touch me without awe,
And tear the bat from under my hair. . . .

ELLIN *enters from the right rear during NEST'S speech, and runs lightly to her.*

ELLIN, *disentangling something from NEST'S hair.*
Can terror shake the smallest queen?
You are no more than a very tall child
Crying for fear of the dark and its people
Of wings and gentle presences.
Look: be ashamed of your noisy dread
Of this dear little mouse with wings who sought
To sleep all day beneath your hair
For love of your savour and company. . . .
Another! Friend bat, it is time to fly.

The Roman general, PLACIDIUS, has entered behind the FIRST SOLDIER during ELLIN'S speech: she perceives him at the last line but one, and straightway glides out by the way she came, launching the bat in the air with a graceful upward sweep of her arm as she goes.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

PLACIDIUS.

What is this scuffling and wild crying, sentry?
Have you laid hands upon the prisoner,
Against the order?

THE FIRST SOLDIER, *presenting arms.*

I have not touched her, Sir;
Although she has encouraged me to approach
her.

She seems to be a maid of a timorous strain,
Who has overgrown her strength or is shaken
with handling;

She cried aloud for fear of a bat in her hair,
Till a lunatic girl, with the cunning of her kind,
Crept past my guard and took it away and soothed
her.

PLACIDIUS.

Madwomen and bats? A trick to rescue her.
Clear this forbidden ground: drive off these
mourners,
Whose still compassion saps our stern effect
Upon the pattern of dishonour here.

WIDAN.

Great sir, I beseech you,
Let me stay with my mistress while she is here:
I will kneel apart and speechless. . . .

THE FIRST SOLDIER, *striking her with the butt of
his spear.* Be off, old hen.
And you, mother, and you; get up, get gone.

B R I T A I N ' S D A U G H T E R

He drives away WIDAN, who goes out to the left front; then he attacks the other women, and drives them toward the right rear, whence they eventually disappear.

THE FIRST WOMAN, *as she goes.*
Aho! Aho! Where can we go to now!

THE THIRD WOMAN, *as she goes.*
Magil, will you not wait for me? Will you not help me?
Magil, Magil!

THE SECOND WOMAN, *approaching and cringing to PLACIDIUS.*

Sir, I have lost my sons :
Grant me a little food. I have lost two sons,
And yet I cannot think of them or grieve,
Being hungry and thirsty and hungry: I can but smell
Smoked beef and apples and honey-bread all night. . . .

THE FIRST SOLDIER, *beating her away.*
Flap away after your clench, and cackle to them.
She follows the others out.

PLACIDIUS.
Sentry, you are relieved: I take your watch,
You are not trusty: go to the Queen's High House
Under arrest, and await me.

THE FIRST SOLDIER. Now, Sir?

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

PLACIDIUS.

Now.

THE FIRST SOLDIER *salutes and goes out
to the right front.*

NEST.

Be just, Placidius, to a luckless man
Who did such duty as he could conceive.
No cold oppression and fierce discipline
Can put our tension and tempered quality
In slack minds and blunt nerves of base-born men.

PLACIDIUS.

An enemy's compassion hurts him most:
He shall be sound again for the next battle.
But what of the wild Princess and her fault?
And what shall heal her honour but her knife?
This kingdom you have won by hardihood
Is narrow, but your kingdom of to-morrow
Will be more narrow: beneath your veil of night
The frost has strung cold jewels in your mane,
But when the night's dark mercy is stripped from
you
More darkness and more cold will enter you. . . .

NEST.

What do you wish to say?

PLACIDIUS.

This: with the slow, inevitable dawn
An army awakes to a thought of death for you:
It will not be an easy or swift death,
And memories of devotion bring me now
To cut your bonds and lend you a Roman sword,
If you have fortitude to fall on it
And die before your time, your appointed time,
As many have died for you . . .

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

NEST.

Or otherwise?

PLACIDIUS.

If love with a sharp sword and hard aspect
Seems worthier to you than love once seemed
Muffled in deference, hushed in a Queen's house,
And you will take my love, it can be strong
To arrest you wavering down the gulf of death
Like a torn leaf: you shall be sent to Rome,
To kind captivity with a trusty lady,
Until I can return to you and turn
Your bondage to a name . . .

NEST.

You were once envoy at my Mother's court,
And ate her bread: I would not spouse you then,
For all your sleek words and your Roman pride;
So shall I now be ready for that name
Of Roman wife, when guesthood's holiness
Is desecrated, my clear, reverend blood
Polluted with Latin thongs of gross beasts' hides,
My naked limbs soiled with ten thousand eyes?

PLACIDIUS.

It is not to be thought of that a slave
From a defeated and subjected race,
Whose body is blemished by the Roman justice,
Could be a Roman's wife.
I owed it to my men
That in their sight your falseness and marred faith
Should cost you much, for it has cost them much:
Yet when I heard you sing aloud for battle,
And when I saw you twisting, dumb with stripes,
Your voice had power in me, your silence hurt:
If you will but submit, and go to Rome,

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

You shall not lack consideration long,
Grave and honourable and sweet and sure.

NEST.

Beings that can conquer and rule, I learn too late,
Are ignorant of the motions of man's mind.
When I am dead
My cromlech, or charred ash upon the site
Of the savage Roman rite of corpse-burning,
Is hallowed for the offspring of the soil;
I shall be here for ever in their minds,
The god-folk's plan of Britain will lighten there,
I shall defeat you by unborn hands in the end.

PLACIDIUS.

Nest, will you die for a thought?
You should be mother to a fighter's sons.
Submit, and let us wed in Britain here.

*As he speaks, NEST is listening with
averted head as if to something far
away; then she begins to cry quietly
and hopelessly.*

NEST, *in the low voice of her continuing weeping.*
Nursy, do you hear it? Hush, hush and listen!
It is there again: the cubs on Morning Side
Are wakeful in the starlight, playing and whining
Before their earth, the vixen watching them. . . .
I shall never, never hear them any more,
Or scent them in the down-hill Autumn wind. . . .

PLACIDIUS.

Is exile darker to her than slow death is?
A YOUNG CENTURION *enters from the
right front.*

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

THE CENTURION.

Get to your station, sentinel; you misuse
Your duty; you are here to prevent speech
With this fierce, tethered woman. . . .

PLACIDIUS.

Whom do you seek?

THE CENTURION.

Give me your pardon, Sir. I am sent to you :
I have sought you at every outpost with much
news.

The Western rabble is captainless and broken,
It has melted like earth-ramparts in a flood,
There is nothing left to pursue. . . .

NEST.

Romans, O kill me now.

THE CENTURION.

Tidings of insurrection in North Gaul
Met face to face with these upon your threshold :
You are asked for any troops that can be sent.

PLACIDIUS.

There is here no more to do: five hundred men
Can garrison this arrogant kingdom now:
Hasten, embark the rest with the first light.

THE CENTURION.

If we must wait for daylight a tide is lost.
The shipmasters advise that in an hour
The galleys will float; in two the ebb will come.

PLACIDIUS.

Then fire the rest of the village for your torch.
Are any foes left there?

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

THE CENTURION. Not fighting men,
But grey-beards, bedridden, maimed, idiots and
babes.

PLACIDIUS.

The old women of the tribe will think of them.
Choose all the comeliest of the younger women,
Herd them down to the ships before the troops,
And get them under hatches first: send men
To loose this queenling and ship her too to Gaul.
I will come with you: there are other orders.

*PLACIDIUS and the CENTURION go out
together by the right front.*

NEST.

Britain, dear land, my land, I am not one
To mouth my passion for you in other ears:
I have not crept to you for self's mean ends,
Base use, foul warmth, like fleas in a dog's coat,
Serfs in a Queen's house: I am a child
Of your beneficent spirit, O my earth;
I have gone up from you like a still tree,
In soaring contemplation looking down,
At one with you by sap and breath-stirred
thoughts;

And when my root is cut I shall not live.
And you, O nearer Mother and my source,
Mabyn and Guenliam my sisters true,
I have failed you; if I had been more eager to die,
More willing to go from Britain as you have gone,
I might at least have slept unconquered here,
I might have conquered: a mindless, moon-
marred girl

Has put me from a throne in my own mind,
Shewing me myself made common by new fear;

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

And then I lost my freedom's latest hope:
I cannot die for Britain now, nor be
Of your dread fellowship again; alone,
Alone I must go forth, not to death or life
But to a waste between them, not to be borne.
Mother and sisters and O land, my land,
Forgive me for my agony's sake. Farewell.

While NEST is speaking WIDAN enters stealthily from the left front; she moves warily toward NEST, until, when NEST'S speech is near its close, she is kneeling at NEST'S feet, bowing over them and clasping them, her body heaving and shaking soundlessly.

In the meantime a ruddy glow has appeared at the right, increasing until it has become a deep glare which illuminates the shore, the waters and the ships, leaving only the sky still dark.

A confused, continuous, indistinguishable clamour, in which women's voices predominate, is heard. It grows and approaches: then straggling women run across the stage from the right toward the ships, followed by more and more, until the shore is almost covered with a tossing, shouting, wailing crowd of many women, a few halt or bandaged men, and some old people; many are in disordered dress, many are in night-clothes, some are half dressed with bare backs or shoulders gleaming in the fiery light. They are followed by Roman pikemen, who drive them forward.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

A YOUNG SOLDIER, *urging onward* ENNID, *a woman with a baby in her arms.*

Put down the child, or I must throw it down :
No woman needs to carry a babe to Rome.

ENNID.

Sir, let me take him with me ; let me keep him ;
He needs no food but that which my love yields
him.

I will give all that you can ask, if I may keep him.

THE YOUNG SOLDIER.

If you will lay it down, it may well live ;
If I must throw it down it will die.

AN OLD MAN, *stepping forward and touching*
ENNID'S *arm.* Young mother,

War is a surging among blind elements ;
It cannot hear you ; you cannot strive with it.
Trust me ; give me your child, and it shall live,
And I will care for it.

ENNID, *in intervals of kissing the child from head*
to foot. His name is Brechan :

Tell him my name was Ennid, that I was young,
And that I'll walk the world and come again.
What is your name?

THE OLD MAN. Cadvan.

ENNID. My heart will remember.
To THE YOUNG SOLDIER.

I will obey you, sir ; let my mind halt

B R I T A I N ' S D A U G H T E R

And veer to such an unbelievable thing.
Why must you hasten? The others are not yet
shipped.
Let me give him his morning milk before I go.

THE YOUNG SOLDIER.

If you can do it quickly you may do it.

ENNID *tears her dress open to the waist
with a single movement, and, putting
her baby to her breast, kneels between
the OLD MAN and the SOLDIER, and
rocks backward and forward slightly.*

A SOLDIER *with a sword elbows his way
toward NEST, and hacks at the cords
which bind her hands to the post.*

WIDAN, *starting to her feet.*

Her hands! O, spare her hands.

*The cords are severed: NEST falls to the
ground like a shed garment.*

Ah, ah, you have hurt her; you have killed her,
you.

*She kneels by the side of NEST and raises
her in her arms.*

What has he done to you, my heart's first clothing?

THE SOLDIER, *pricking NEST with his sword.*

Up! Up! March to the ships. Stir, or I'll stir you.

NEST, *putting WIDAN aside and rising with
difficulty.*

Nurse, do not touch me. I must go alone.
Follow me if you can.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

*She balances herself uncertainly an instant,
then steps forward into the crowd and
disappears, followed by WIDAN and
the SOLDIER.*

*As the crowd drifts out to the left, toward
the ships, new comers pour in from
the right. Among them is an OLD
WOMAN clawing a YOUNG WOMAN'S
shoulder, and growling like a dog.
The YOUNG WOMAN breaks away,
grasping the bodice of her dress.*

THE OLD WOMAN.

Why did I bear you for shamelessness and
greed. . . .

You have struck your mother: may you have
leper's hands. . . .

Give me my shoulder-brooches. Unbosom them.

THE YOUNG WOMAN.

What kind of a mother are you? You are done:
You muffle your withering neck, and need no
adornments.

Your mother gave them to you: it is my turn,
And yet you grudge me all you can do for me now,
When I must go to exile among strange men.

*She makes a derisive gesture and plunges
into the crowd: the OLD WOMAN
follows her with a cry.*

THE YOUNG SOLDIER, to ENNID.

I can wait no more. Have done: there is no other
way.

ENNID.

Must it be now?

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

*She takes her child from her breast, and,
averting herself, holds it out back-
ward to the OLD MAN, who receives
it.*

Take him, old father; take him and hide him
from me.

*She stands for a moment with empty, un-
moving arms, then stumbles away
blindly into the crowd.*

The YOUNG SOLDIER follows her.

ELLIN appears on the prow of the foremost
ship: the veiling pallor of her appear-
ance is lost in the irradiating fire-
glow: the unseen flames are glassed
in her wide eyes.

ELLIN, *extending imploring arms.*

Ellin dreads this moving water,
This shifting floor; take her to shore.
The souls on the waters will cry for Ellin,
To share her body;

She wrings her hands.

And she must not go from here,
For her little one, her dear,
Has found its body again,
And she has left it here.
She has not learnt to walk upon water,
Take her with you, take her away;
Or she cannot sleep with stones again
And wait until her child is seen.

*The light suddenly brightens; she claps
her hands and points.*

Look; look, what flames
Leap from men's hearts
As a nation consumes;

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

Upward we yearn for escape
With spiritual limbs of fire,
And when they fail with the flame
Hearts' ashes will whisper to night,
Night of our earth, of our home. . . .

A SAILOR, *starting up behind ELLIN, throwing an arm round her, and dragging her backward out of sight.*

Come down, white owl, come down.

NEST *steps on to the prow in ELLIN'S place, gathering her cloak about her with one hand.*

The general uproar takes on an angry sound, and separate cries are heard.

There is our enemy Betrayer Wolf
She knew how to save herself she dare not stay here

She has sold us to the Romans and shelters with them

She has ruined us and forsakes us She will escape us

Night-hag Traitor Untrue. . . .

NEST, *making a gesture for silence.*

Hear me.

I have not a defence left to me

Against a foe: I do not need one now:

There is no more defeat that I can feel.

Why will you spit in a dead woman's face,

Affront the unburied, sting the cold quiet heart,

Gash the unhappy dead? I go from you;

I shall not more offend you though you shew mercy.

Yet I will not belittle my intention,

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

Or any deeds of mine. Britain is lost,
But not my love has lost it, not my devotion:
A tide of ruin has come over us,
And I, who strung myself to stand against it
And let it spend itself on me, have gone
Down with weak foothold and wave-weighted head:
But that is not my sin. Hear me again:
Hereafter hear me in your memories:

A SAILOR, *unseen*.

Laggards, weigh, weigh the anchor; the flood is
here.

Tune up and haul on the cable.

A sound of trampling feet follows.

NEST, *continuing*.

When your new servitude is heavy and old,
And you tell over its cause and speak of me,
Say that I might have slipt past misery
By delicate dishonour and loosening ease,
But that I went alone to an unknown country,
An unknown servitude, an unknown end,
And that I once was Britain's daughter: then
You will bethink you that a state of Britain
Has been unbuilt, that it had once been built
And can be built again. Remember. Britain. . . .

*She puts her hands to her head, reels, and
falls backward in a swoon.*

A SECOND SAILOR, *singing unseen*.

Hannibal was a man of Carthage;

CHORUS OF MANY SAILORS, *unseen*.

Hoi! Hoi! Does the anchor stir?

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

THE SECOND SAILOR.

A town of towers and too much wharfage:

CHORUS.

Hoi! Hoi! There is weed on her.

Hannibal tried to travel to Rome,

The heart of the world, where all would come;

But he never saw Rome, and he never saw home.

Hannibal! Hannibal! Hoihoihoi!

WIDAN *crouches on the deck and takes*
NEST *into her arms during the singing.*

THE OLD WOMAN, *as WIDAN raises NEST.*

Her royal tricks and her royal words again

Will cheat us if we listen: shut your ears,

Britons, shut your minds until she too

Does this duty to Britain she preaches about

And rids the land and us of the last of her blood.

Young women of Britain, look on my miserable-
ness

And all this ruined place, and learn by it

What comes to a nation when a forward daughter

Thinks she was born to mend her mother's blunders.

If the old Queen had lived we should have won;

Nothing uncomfortable would have happened to
us;

We should not now be sport to our green
daughters.

THE YOUNG WOMAN, *in the ship and leaning over
the side.*

That is my mother: tie up her head in her petticoat,

To-night she has sold her daughter to save herself.

We should do well enough if we had no mothers:

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

The old Queen dared the Romans and dashed us
down,
But her poor daughter, whose spirit has here
given way,
Did what she could to save us; she is young
And has her sense in her and is not addled
By carnal subservience and chewed fireside wisdom.

A SAILOR, *unseen*.
She floats!

ANOTHER SAILOR, *unseen*.
She moves! Out with the starboard sweeps;
And fend her from the other ship. Look out!

A YOUNG MAN, *wounded and bandaged*.
It is too true; this bleached uncouraged girl
Was yesterday a flame that could deface,
A sudden storm that could drive down our foes.
Icenians, it is hard to all of us
To stay alive to-night: it is more hard
To this unpractised Queen: she has proved herself
Within the minds of all who fought for her,
Yet she is made a subject by strange men,
And she must go alone to be despised,
Even to become unknown, and yet to live.
I say to her against your heartless cries
Farewell, queenly and lovely in my mind,
Farewell and come again before old age
Takes all your comrades and puts out the eyes
That saw you in your pride: we are your kingdom.
Daughter of Britain, farewell.

MORE AND MORE MEN.

Farewell! Farewell!

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

NEST, *raising herself in WIDAN'S arms.*
What voice of kindness breaks and shortly ceases,
Like music when a door is opened and shut?
Where am I, nurse? I have been absent, I
Have come again to Britain from a place
That did not know me; for I heard but now
A British voice again at last, at last.
Yet someone said "Farewell. . . ."

A GIRL, *from the ship and unseen.*
The ship is going! O, O, O!

NEST.
Nurse, do not answer me: I do remember.
O you, unknown and nameless and my friend,
When I have reached that place where no man's
speech
Means anything and sound has no more use,
I will not learn their inexpressive words,
I'll break the inmost kernels of my ears
To hold within unmixed your living voice
That joins me now to Britain and its men,
And sends me out in membership to insults
For Britain's sake, accepted and secure
On my dead throne, to be excused and loved
As weaklings are, losers and failures are
When they are dead. Farewell.

THE MEN.

Farewell!

NEST.

Farewell,

Dear land, my land.

THE MEN AND A WOMAN.

Farewell!

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

NEST.

Farewell!

NEST'S galley, which has been moving gradually throughout her speech, disappears to the left during her last words: the other galley follows it.

THE MEN AND SOME WOMEN, *hurrying off to the left after the galleys.* Farewell!

THE OLD WOMAN.

Would the fools wade to Rome after the chit?

THE SECOND WOMAN.

A shipful of young women is sure to draw
Men after it: but this is a welcome ship,
Relieving us of all the pushing things
Who have grown up too quickly and jostled us.
Follow the men to the Ness: when the ship has
gone
And they feel lonely they will take our comfort.

THE FIRST WOMAN.

Call out "Farewell, farewell"; it will please the
men.

THE REMAINING WOMEN, *mechanically and meaninglessly as they run out in the wake of the men.*

Farewell, farewell, farewell.

As the stage empties CADVAN is seen to be cowering at the foot of the mooring-post with ENNID'S baby in his arms.

BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

CADVAN.

There is no conqueror except the earth :
The Roman lords will stay too long in Britain,
Whose water and inbreathed air and soil-borne
fruit

Shall in the darkness of their inwards change
Their secret seed into such British sparks
As those that spread a running fire in ling:
Not Rome but Britain shall be strong by them.
It will be so : but what is that to me?

To-night my sinking helpless country lies
In the cold ruins of its shrunk past,
As in the trembling arms and shrivelled breast
Of an old failing man a little child
Lies ignorantly and blindly feels for dugs
That do not nourish it.

The little child, restless within my breast,
I cannot nourish yet or much protect ;
I am a houseless wifeless aged man ;
When men must save themselves I can do little ;
I can but sit, although the child may die,
And wait for pity and help, and if it weeps
Whimper with it amid this night of woe
For Britain that is like a friendless child.

*He bows himself over the child and sobs
in a high quavering voice like an old
woman's.*

CURTAIN

GRUACH & BRITAIN'S DAUGHTER

SOME PRESS OPINIONS

Mr. Edmund Gosse in *The Sunday Times*.

The department of literature in which Mr. Gordon Bottomley has slowly but firmly risen to eminence is one which has been little exploited; it may be described as prehistoric historical tragedy. . . . I shall not be guilty of suggesting that Mr. Bottomley is a better tragedian than Shakespeare, but it is certain that the mere setting of his play "Britain's Daughter" is much more plausible than that of Shakespeare's mixture of Holinshed and Boccaccio in the ludicrously inadequate setting of "Cymbeline." . . . The great danger of tragic poetry is to be sublime and magnificent, but to be out of relation with life. The only mode in which the poet can avoid this blemish is to determine, however wildly romantic he is, to preserve the laws of moral realism. . . . It is because Mr. Bottomley has grasped this truth that his dramatic experiments are so interesting and so promising.

Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie in *The Liverpool Daily Post*.

It was remarkable enough that Mr. Bottomley should have proved himself capable of worthily inventing a prelude to "Lear"; it is astonishing that the success should be repeated in a prelude to "Macbeth." But it has become clear now that at no time in the history of English poetry since the seventeenth century has the requisite combination of dramatic and poetic talents existed, until now in the person of Mr. Bottomley. . . . What is plain is that in both plays we have a renewal of the many-sided Elizabethan creativeness; the power of vivid exposition and organic structure, the command of subtle metre and profoundly symbolic imagery.

The Times Literary Supplement.

In "Gruach" we have an unforgettable creation. . . . In the handling of such situations and of the supernatural element Mr. Bottomley's skill is very sure. There is no intrusion of artifice, but both serve to heighten the reality of an atmosphere

SOME PRESS OPINIONS

in which the forces of nature are functioning so intensely as to be in themselves supernatural. . . . These plays are both pure poetry and pure drama . . . in every detail of construction they are written for great and sustained acting. . . . They stand in the direct line of succession from Elizabethan days because they reflect life seen in its essence rather than in its incidents . . . the universal note of great poetry.

The New Statesman.

Mr. Bottomley is a poet in whom the poetic and dramatic imagination have been equally and harmoniously developed . . . for his own purposes his methods are admirable, and his mastery complete. . . . "Britain's Daughter" as a whole is the most moving and tragic play that Mr. Bottomley has yet written.

Theatre-Craft.

"Gruach" is a daring experiment, amply justified by its successful issue.

C.P. in The Manchester Guardian.

"Gruach" shows Mr. Bottomley's splendid qualities as a poet . . . his extraordinary mastery of verse movement, and specially his poetically imaginative power. . . . In "Britain's Daughter" the poetry of madness can seldom have been better given than in *Ellin*. . . . This play is Mr. Bottomley's sure title to his reputation.

Morning Post.

A new volume of poetry-drama by Mr. Gordon Bottomley is an event, for there is to-day no one quite the equal of Mr. Bottomley in the mastery of this art-form. . . . In "Britain's Daughter" he rises to a rare height of dramatic passion . . . the quality of the verse is as tense and powerful as the theme it celebrates.

Saturday Westminster Gazette.

After their singular dramatic weight, their grave and concentrated force, the most remarkable characteristic of these plays is the stubborn life of their people. . . . The skill . . . the craftsmanship, and sense of character-drawing by which he builds just such a girl as Lady Macbeth might have been are astonishing.

SOME PRESS OPINIONS

Mr. Eugene Mason in *The Bookman*.

An excellent example of Mr. Bottomley's gift of dramatic dialogue, presented in the form of passionate and lovely verse . . . full of colour, of poetry and of tense situation. . . . Intolerably moving and almost hauntingly beautiful.

The Nation and Athenaeum.

Its remarkable unity of atmosphere, cumulative intensity, and mastery of a tight-woven dramatic structure. . . . Swiftess, fire, economy of effect, suspense, torrential vigour, finality, and a clean sweep of all superfluous poetic ornament . . . a passionate blank verse, finding an appropriate mean between natural speech and poetic diction, and between strength and flexibility.

The Saturday Review.

If "Macbeth" were to be erased from knowledge, "Gruach" might continue in virtue of its own power of characterization, its supple and masculine poetry, its sense of the beating of dark wings. . . . Mr. Bottomley has assuredly taught us that he is capable of the Elizabethan quality. Of whom else would it not be a folly and a heart-breaking to ask it?

The Nation, New York.

Mr. Bottomley does sizable things, and he needs to be read by such as maintain that only novelists to-day show mind. . . . He is an excellent poet and he ought to be better known.

The Evening Post, New York.

Gordon Bottomley is, to my mind, unique in his field, and these plays are better than anything he has published yet.

Revue Germanique, Paris, July 1921. In "Revue Annuelle: Le Théâtre Anglais."

Ce nouvel auteur excelle à envelopper les personnages et le décor de ses drames d'une lumière particulière qui donne au moindre détail de l'action un singulier relief. Ce don de créer une atmosphère, M. Bottomley le possède à un degré tel qu'il n'en existe peut-être pas d'autre exemple dans le théâtre d'aujourd'hui. Il possède aussi à un degré unique le sens du mystérieux.



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